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**THE CORRESPONDENCE OF  
WILLIAM COWPER**



# THE CORRESPONDENCE OF WILLIAM COWPER

**ARRANGED IN CHRONOLOGICAL  
ORDER, WITH ANNOTATIONS**

BY THOMAS WRIGHT

**PRINCIPAL OF COWPER SCHOOL, OLNEY**

**AUTHOR OF 'THE LIFE OF WILLIAM COWPER,' ETC.**

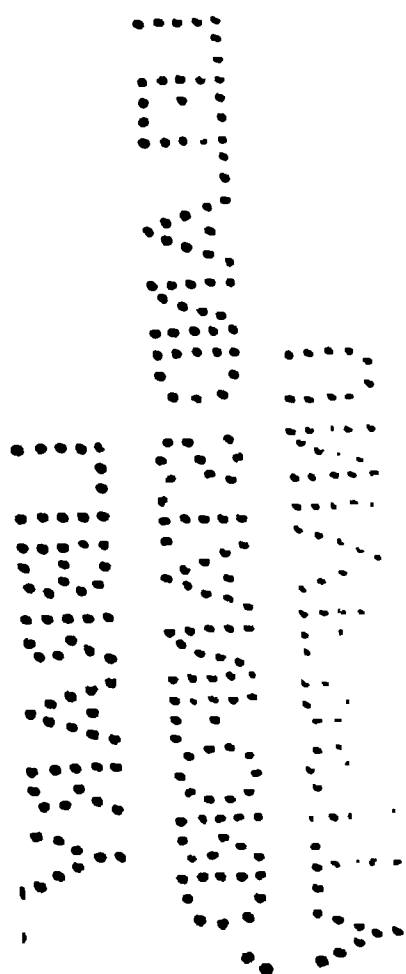
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# THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM COWPER

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*April 1, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have made you wait long for an answer, and am now obliged to write in a hurry. But lest my longer silence should alarm you, hurried as I am, still I write. I told you, if I mistake not, that the circle of my correspondence has lately been enlarged ; and it seems still increasing, which, together with my poetical business, makes an *hour a momentous* affair. Pardon an unintentional pun. You need not fear for my health. It suffers nothing by my employment. I hope also that you have no need to fear lest I should hereafter suffer by disappointment. No care shall be wanting on my part to guard against it. I return you many thanks for all your friendly services in the matter of subscription. When you saw Johnson that business was so much in its infancy, that it was not likely that many names should have been entered in his book. Neither General Cowper, nor his son, nor Lady Hesketh have yet given in their lists. The latter has now communicated a few names at Johnson's, and probably a few at Walker's also, and at Debrett's, for the present honour of the catalogue, and that

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A



and upwards; but our intercourse having been lately revived, is likely to become closer, warmer, and more intimate than ever.

Lady Hesketh also comes down in June; and if she can be accommodated with any thing in the shape of a dwelling at Olney, talks of making it always, in part, her summer residence. It has pleased God that I should, like Joseph, be put into a well; and because there are no Midianites in the way to deliver me, therefore my friends are coming down into the well to see me.

I wish you,—we both wish you, all happiness in your new habitation: at least, you will be sure to find the situation more commodious. I thank you for all your hints concerning my work, which shall be duly attended to. You may assure all whom it may concern, that all offensive elisions will be done away. With Mrs. Unwin's love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, I remain, my dear friend,  
affectionately yours, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*April 3, Mond., 1786.*

HAVE you the hardiness to bid me wait till August for your coming, or even to suggest such an idea to me, who have been so long numbering off days and weeks with impatient expectation of June? My cousin, I will not wait till August, neither can Mrs. Unwin wait till August. I insist, and she entreats, that you come at the time appointed. Is there any thing future to which we look forward with equal pleasure? With pleasure, indeed, we expect the



are mine also. When I left St. Albans, I left it under impressions of the existence of a God, and of the truth of Scripture, that I had never felt before. I had unspeakable delight in the discovery, and was impatient to communicate a pleasure to others that I found so superior to every thing that bears the name. This eagerness of spirit, natural to persons newly informed, and the less to be wondered at in me who had just emerged from the horrors of despair, made me imprudent, and, I doubt not, troublesome to many. Forgetting that I had not *those* blessings at my command, which it is God's peculiar prerogative to impart—spiritual light and affections, I required, in effect, of all with whom I conversed that they should see with my eyes ; and stood amazed that the Gospel, which with me was all in all, should meet with opposition, or should occasion disgust in any. But the Gospel could not be the word of God if it did not ; for it foretells its own reception among men, and describes it as exactly such. Good is intended, but harm is done too often by the zeal with which I was at that time animated. But as in affairs of this life, so in religious concerns likewise, experience begets some wisdom in all who are not incapable of being taught. I do not now, neither have I for a long time, made it my practice to force the subject of evangelical truth on any. I received it not from man myself, neither can any man receive it from me. God is light, and from him all light must come : to *His* teaching, therefore, I leave those with whom I was once so alert to instruct myself. If a man asks my opinion, or calls for an account of my faith, he shall have it ; otherwise I trouble him



in my account, because it proves that he interests himself in my work, notwithstanding all.

I wrote, my dearest cousin, to the General on Saturday, and then told him that he would not receive my bundle of poetry in less than a fortnight. At that time I thought of detaining the third, fourth, and fifth books till I should have re-revised the first, and then that I would send them all at once. But I have changed my mind. Fuseli is at present out of work. It would not be civil to make him wait long for more, and the three last-mentioned books are ready; I shall, therefore, as before, send them to you; you will communicate with the General; and he to Fuseli. They will set off on Wednesday by Wellingborough coach. The first quire destined to Dr. Maty's inspection I am now going to take in hand. Should I find it necessary to transcribe the whole or much of it, that business, and the correction of it together, will necessarily take time, but you shall have it as soon as possible. My dear, stroke my pate, and say that I am a good child. I send you, I suppose, above two thousand lines, and not two hundred in the whole of the first translation. In fact, I am making a new translation, and find that the work will be much a gainer by it. I grudge no pains so that I may be but a famous poet, and make you as proud as I wish you to be of your cousin in a corner. *Apropos de ça*—if I have not visited my neighbours, it has been owing to many lions in the way; to a dread of strangers, increased by having seen none for many years; to a total incapacity through indisposition, but very lately, in part, removed; and to necessity, arising from the following





him;—the axe was the consequence. Adieu, my dear fellow-pilgrim in all our pleasant places, for such you shall be.—Ever affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

I tell you a remarkable coincidence of dates and events: I received your present of wine on my birthday, November 26; the desk on the 7th of December, the day when I left London; and my snuff-box, etc., from Anonymous on the 24th of January, on which day, twelve years ago, I plunged into a melancholy that made me almost an infant. I cannot bear to be so concise as want of room obliged me to be on the other side, respecting the wine. Your kindness in making the inquiry is to me better than the wine itself: this is a literal truth, and you may credit it without the least reserve. I had a little of my own when the hamper came, which is the cause of my present abundance. Once more bless you!

The most evident necessity presents itself for your coming in June. We just now learn that these clever apartments cannot be had. The son is to succeed the apprentice in the second chamber. We have offered a bed in our house during your stay, but it is not accepted. There is a tight little house opposite, which I dare say you may have, that will hold you and suite, but it has a west aspect. Perhaps by open windows and curtains it might be kept cool. Mother and daughter only live in it.

Mrs. Unwin begs me to give her most affectionate respects. If you understood Latin, I could tell you, in an elegant line from Horace, how much



of all months, unless you should happen to be here in November too, and make it equally delightful. Before I shall have finished my letter, Mrs. Unwin will have taken a view of the house concerning which you inquire, and I shall be able to give you a circumstantial account of it. The man who built it is lately dead. He had been a common sailor, and assisted under Wolfe and Amherst at the taking of Quebec. When we came hither he was almost penniless, but climbing by degrees into the lace-business, amassed money, and built the house in question. Just before he died, having an enterprising genius, he put almost his whole substance to hazard in sending a large cargo of lace to America, and the venture failing, he has left his widow in penury and distress. For this reason, I conclude that she will have no objection to letting as much of her house as my cousin will have occasion for, and have therefore given you this short history of the matter. The bed is the best in the town, and the honest tar's folly was much laughed at, when it was known that he, who had so often swung in a hammock, had given twenty pounds for a bed. But now I begin to hope that he made a wiser bargain than once I thought it. She is no gentlewoman, as you may suppose, but she is nevertheless a very quiet, decent, sober body, and well respected among her neighbours.

But Hadley, my dearest cousin, what is to be said of Hadley? Only this at present, that having such an inhabitant as Mr. Burrows, and the hope belonging to it of such another inhabitant as yourself, it has all charms, all possible recommendations. Yes; had I the wings that David wished for, I would



most unlike the original. So it has happened to me in this instance: my fancy assured me that Mr. Burrows was a slim, elegant young man, dressed always to the very point of exactness, with a sharp face, a small voice, a delicate address, and the gentlest manners. Such was my dream of Mr. Burrows, and how my dream of him came to be such I know not, unless it arose from what I seemed to have collected out of the several letters in which you have mentioned him. From them I learned that he has wit, sense, taste, and genius, with which qualities I do not generally connect the ideas of bulk and rotundity; and from them I also learned that he has numerous connections at your end of the town, where the company of those who have anything rough in their exterior is least likely to be coveted. So it must have come to pass that I made to myself such a very unsuitable representation of him. But I am not sorry that he is such as he is. He is no loser by the bargain, in my account. I am not the less delighted with his high approbation, and wish for no better fortune as a poet, than always so to please such men as Mr. Burrows. I will not say, my dear, that you yourself gain any advantage in my opinion by the difference; for to seat you higher there than you were always seated, is not possible. I will only observe in this instance, as always in all instances, I discover a proof of your own good sense and discernment, who finding in Mr. Burrows a mind so deserving of your esteem and regard, have not suffered your eye to prejudice you against it; a *faux pas* into which I have known ladies of very good understanding betrayed ere now, I assure you. Had there been a question last year



little room close to your own for Mrs. Eaton, and there is room for Cooke and Samuel. The terms are half a guinea a week; but it seems as if we were never to take a step without a stumble. The kitchen is bad,—it has, indeed, never been used except as a washhouse; for people at Olney do not eat and drink as they do in other places. I do not mean, my dear, that they quaff nectar or feed on ambrosia, but *tout au contraire*. So what must be done about this abominable kitchen? It is out of doors: that is not amiss. It has neither range nor jack: that is terrible. But then range and jack are not unattainables; they may be easily supplied. And if it were not—abominable kitchen that it is, no bigger than half an egg-shell, shift might be made. The good woman is content that your servants should eat and drink in her parlour, but expects that they shall disperse themselves when they have done. But whither, who can say? unless into the arbour in the garden, for that they should solace themselves in said kitchen were hardly to be expected. While I write this, Mrs. U. is gone to attempt a treaty with the linendraper over the way, which, if she succeeds, will be best of all, because the rooms are better, and it is just at hand. I must halt till she returns.—She returns;—nothing done. She is gone again to another place. Once more I halt. Again she returns and opens the parlour door with these tidings:—‘I have succeeded beyond my utmost hopes. I went to Maurice Smith’s’ (he, you must know, my dear, is a Jack-of-all-trades); ‘I said, do you know if Mr. Brightman<sup>1</sup> could and would let lodgings ready furnished

<sup>1</sup> Currier. Lived at Dagnell Manor, Olney.





I am so charmed with the subject that concludes my letter that I grudge every inch of paper to any other. Yet must I allow myself space to say that Lord Dartmouth's behaviour to you at the concert has won my heart to him more than ever. It was such a well-timed kindness to me, and so evidently performed with an equal design of giving pleasure to you, that I love him for it at my heart. I have never, indeed, at any time, had occasion to charge him, as I know that many have done, with want of warmth in his friendship.—I honour you, my dear, for your constellation of nobles. I rejoice that the contents of my box have pleased you: may I never write any thing that does not! My friend Bull brought me to-day the last *Gentleman's Magazine*. There your cousin is held up again. Oh rare coz!

## TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, April 17, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—If you will not quote Solomon, my dearest cousin, I will. He says, and as beautiful as truly—‘Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life!’ I feel how much reason he had on his side when he made this observation, and am myself sick of your fortnight's delay.

The vicarage was built by Lord Dartmouth, and was not finished till some time after we arrived at Olney, consequently it is new. It is a smart stone building, well sashed, by much too good for the living, but just what I would wish for you. It has, as you justly concluded from my premises, a garden,



beloved, and will be so at Olney, and Mrs. U. expects you with the pleasure that one feels at the return of a long absent, dear relation; that is to say, with a pleasure such as mine. She sends you her warmest affections.

On Friday I received a letter from dear Anonymous, apprising me of a parcel that the coach would bring me on Saturday. Who is there in the world that has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be so sacred to me, that if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery. I long to assure him that those same eyes, concerning which he expresses such kind apprehensions, lest they should suffer by this laborious undertaking, are as well as I could expect them to be, if I were never to touch either book or pen. Subject to weakness, and occasional slight inflammations, it is probable that they will always be; but I cannot remember the time when they enjoyed any thing so like an exemption from those infirmities as at present. One would almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world. I should be happy to remove his solicitude on the subject, but it is a pleasure that he will not let me enjoy. Well then, I will be content without it; and so content that, though I believe you, my dear, to be in full possession of all this mystery, you shall never know me, while you live, either directly, or by hints of any sort, attempt to extort, or to steal the secret from



## TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, April 24, 1786.*

YOUR letters are so much my comfort, that I often tremble lest by any accident I should be disappointed ; and the more because you have been, more than once, so engaged in company on the writing day, that I have had a narrow escape. Let me give you a piece of good counsel, my cousin : follow my laudable example,—write when you can ; take Time's forelock in one hand, and a pen in the other, and so make sure of your opportunity. It is well for me that you write faster than anybody, and more in an hour than other people in two, else I know not what would become of me. When I read your letters I hear you talk, and I love talking letters dearly, especially from you. Well ! the middle of June will not be always a thousand years off, and when it comes I shall hear you, and see you too, and shall not care a farthing then if you do not touch a pen in a month. By the way, you must either send me, or bring me some more paper, for before the moon shall have performed a few more revolutions I shall not have a scrap left,—and tedious revolutions they are just now, that is certain.

I give you leave to be as peremptory as you please, especially at a distance ; but when you say that you are a Cowper (and the better it is for the Cowpers that such you are, and I give them joy of you, with all my heart), you must not forget that I boast myself a Cowper too, and have my humours, and fancies, and purposes, and determinations, as



The grass begins to grow, and the leaves to bud, and every thing is preparing to be beautiful against you come. Adieu! W. C.

You inquire of our walks, I perceive, as well as of our rides: they are beautiful. You inquire also concerning a cellar: you have two cellars. Oh! what years have passed since we took the same walks, and drank out of the same bottle! but a few more weeks, and then!

## TO LADY HESKETH

*May 1, 1786.*

You need not trouble yourself, my dearest cousin, about paper, my kind and good friend the General having undertaken of his own mere motion to send me all that I ever want, whether for transcript or correspondence. My dear, there is no possible project within the compass of invention, by which you can be released from the necessity of keeping your own nags at Olney, if you keep your carriage here. At the Swan<sup>1</sup> they have no horses, or, which is equally negative in such a case, they have but one. At the Bull, indeed, they keep a chaise; but, not to mention the disagreeable of using one inn and hiring from another, or the extortionate demands that the woman of the Bull ever makes when anything either gentle or noble is so unhappy as to fall into her hands, her steeds are so seldom disengaged, that you would find the disappointments endless. The chaise, of course, is engaged equally, and the town of Olney affords nothing else into

<sup>1</sup> An inn on the market-place. It had a wooden balcony.





has prevailed to win us away from all the others. There was, indeed, some time since, in a neighbouring parish called Lavendon, a field,<sup>1</sup> one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little paradise: but the poplars have been felled, and the scene has suffered so much by the loss, that though still in point of prospect beautiful, it has not charms sufficient to attract me now. A certain poet wrote a copy of verses<sup>2</sup> on this melancholy occasion, which, though they have been printed, I dare say you never saw. When you come, therefore, you shall see them; but, as I told you in my last, not before. No, my dear, not a moment sooner; and for the reason in my last given I shall disobey your mandate with respect to those of F. Hill:<sup>3</sup> and for another reason also: if I copy them, they will occupy all the rest of my paper, which I cannot spare; and if I enclose the original, I must send my packet to Palace Yard, and you finding that the postman passed your door without dropping a letter from me would conclude that I had neglected to write; and I will not incur such a suspicion in your mind for a moment.

On Saturday,—for sooner than Saturday, we could not, on account of the weather,—we paid our visit at Weston, and a very agreeable visit we found it. We encountered there, besides the family, four ladies, all strange to us. One of them was a Miss Bagot, a sister of my friend Walter's; and another of them was a Mrs. Chester, his sister-in-

<sup>1</sup> Lynch Close, near Lavendon Mill (a flour mill).

<sup>2</sup> 'The poplars are felled, farewell to the shade.'

<sup>3</sup> Fanny Hill. See letter of April 24, 1786.



evening I ordered my labourer to trundle up a wheel-barrow of myrtles and canary lavender (a most fragrant plant) to Weston, with which I sent a note to Mrs. Throckmorton, recommending them to her protection. *Dites moi, ma chère, ne suis-je homme tout à fait poli?*

Weston, as I told you, is about a mile off, but in truth it is rather more. Gayhurst is five miles off: I have walked there, but I never walked thither. I have not these many years been such an extravagant tramper as I once was. I did myself no good I believe by pilgrimages of such immoderate length. The Chesters, the Throckmortons, the Wrightes, are all of them good-natured agreeable people, and I rejoice, for your sake, that they lie all within your beat. Of the rest of our neighbours I know nothing. They are not, indeed, many. A Mr. Praed lives at a seat called Tyingham, which is also about five miles hence; but him I never saw, save once, when I saw him jump over a rail at Weston. There is a Mr. Towers at a place called Astwoodberry, about seven miles off; but he is a foxhunter merely: and Lord Egmont dwelt in a hired house at a place called Woollaston, at the same distance; but he hired it merely by way of kennel to hold him during the hunting season, and by this time, I suppose, has left it.

The copper is going to work for you again. Fifty gallons of good beer, added to seventy, will serve to moisten your maidens' lips, and the throats of your lacqueys and your coachees, till the season for brewing returns, for it does not succeed in warm weather.

Mrs. Unwin sends you her affections; and the



it contained nothing formidable, though written with malevolence enough, and because a nameless author can have no more weight with his readers than the reason which he has on his side can give him. But Maty's animadversions hurt me more. In part they appeared to me unjust, and in part ill-natured; and yet the man himself being an oracle in every body's account, I apprehended that he had done me much mischief. Why he says that the translation is far from exact, is best known to himself. For I know it to be as exact as is compatible with poetry; and prose translations of Homer are not wanted,—the world has one already. But I will not fill my letter to you with hypercriticisms; I will only add an extract from a letter of Colman's, that I received last Friday, and will then dismiss the subject. It came accompanied by a copy of the specimen, which he himself had amended, and with so much taste and candour that it charmed me. He says as follows:

‘One copy I have returned, with some remarks prompted by my zeal for your success, not, Heaven knows, by arrogance or impertinence. I know no other way at once so plain, and so short, of delivering my thoughts on the specimen of your translation, which on the whole I admire exceedingly, thinking it breathes the spirit, and conveys the manner of the original; though having here neither Homer, nor Pope's Homer, I cannot speak precisely of particular lines or expressions, or compare your blank verse with his rhyme, except by declaring, that I think blank verse infinitely more congenial to the magnificent simplicity of Homer's hexameters, than the confined couplets, and the jingle of rhyme. . . .’



Mrs. Unwin in the re-establishment of your cousin's health. Air and exercise, and she and you together, will make me a perfect Samson. You will have a good house over your head, comfortable apartments, obliging neighbours, good roads, a pleasant country, and in us your constant companions, two who will love you, and do already love you dearly, and with all our hearts. If you are in any danger of trouble, it is from myself, if my fits of dejection seize me; and as often as they do, you will be grieved for me; but perhaps by your assistance I shall be able to resist them better. If there is a creature under heaven, from whose co-operations with Mrs. Unwin I can reasonably expect such a blessing, that creature is yourself. I was not without such attacks when I lived in London, though at that time they were less oppressive; but in your company I was never unhappy a whole day in all my life.

Of how much importance is an author to himself! I return to that abominable specimen again, just to notice Maty's impatient censure of the repetition that you mention: I mean of the word *hand*. In the original there is not a repetition of it. But to repeat a word in that manner, and on such an occasion, is by no means what he calls it, a *modern* invention. In Homer I could show him many such, and in Virgil they abound. Colman, who, in his judgment of classical matters, is inferior to none, says, 'I know not why Maty objects to this expression.' I could easily change it. But the case standing thus, I know not whether my proud stomach will condescend so low. I rather feel myself disinclined to it.





But had he cudgelled the man for his cruel blunder, and the havoc made in consequence of it, I could have excused him.

I felt myself really concerned for the Chancellor's illness, and from what I learned of it, both from the papers, and from General Cowper, concluded that he must die. I am accordingly delighted in the same proportion with the news of his recovery. May he live, and live to be still the support of Government! If it shall be his good pleasure to render me personally any material service, I have no objection to it. But Heaven knows, that it is impossible for any living wight to bestow less thought on that subject than myself.—May God be ever with you, my beloved cousin!

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, May 15, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—From this very morning I begin to date the last month of our long separation, and confidently and most comfortably hope that before the fifteenth of June shall present itself we shall have seen each other. Is it not so? And will it not be one of the most extraordinary eras of my extraordinary life? A year ago, we neither corresponded, nor expected to meet in this world. But this world is a scene of marvellous events, many of them more marvellous than fiction itself would dare to hazard; and, blessed be God! they are not all of the distressing kind. Now and then in the course of an existence, whose hue is for the most part sable, a day turns up that makes amends for many sighs, and many subjects of complaint. Such



work of a good agent. This I know too by experience, that, like all other illusions, they exist only by force of imagination, are indebted for their prevalence to the absence of their object, and in a few moments after its appearance cease. So, then, this is a settled point, and the case stands thus. You will tremble as you draw near to Newport, and so shall I : but we will both recollect that there is no reason why we should, and this recollection will at least have some little effect in our favour. We will likewise both take the comfort of what we know to be true, that the tumult will soon cease, and the pleasure long survive the pain, even as long I trust as we ourselves shall survive it.

What you say of Maty gives me all the consolation that you intended. We both think it highly probable that you suggest the true cause of his displeasure, when you suppose him mortified at not having had a part of the translation laid before him, ere the specimen was published. The General was very much hurt, and calls his censure harsh and unreasonable. He likewise sent me a consolatory letter on the occasion, in which he took the kindest pains to heal the wound that he supposed I might have suffered. I am not naturally insensible, and the sensibilities that I had by nature have been wonderfully enhanced by a long series of shocks, given to a frame of nerves that was never very athletic. I feel accordingly, whether painful or pleasant, in the extreme ; am easily elevated, and easily cast down. The frown of a critic freezes my poetical powers, and discourages me to a degree that makes me ashamed of my own weakness. Yet I presently recover my confidence again. The half



shall be given. Set me down, therefore, my dear, for an industrious rhymers, so long as I shall have the ability. For in this only way is it possible for me, so far as I can see, either to honour God, or to serve man, or even to serve myself.

I rejoice to hear that Mr. Throckmorton wishes to be on a more intimate footing. I am shy, and suspect that he is not very much otherwise; and the consequence has been that we have mutually wished an acquaintance without being able to accomplish it. Blessings on you for the hint that you dropped on the subject of the house at Weston! For the burthen of my song is,—‘Since we have met once again, let us never be separated, as we have been, more.’

W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

*Olney, May 20, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—About three weeks since I met your sister Chester at Mr. Throckmorton’s, and from her learned that you are at Blithfield, and in health. Upon the encouragement of this information it is that I write now; I should not otherwise have known with certainty where to find you, or have been equally free from the fear of unseasonable intrusion. May God be with you, my friend, and give you a just measure of submission to His will, the most effectual of all remedies for the evils of this changing scene. I doubt not that He has granted you this blessing already, and may He still continue it!

Now I will talk a little about myself: for except myself, living in this *terrarum angulo*, what can I



may change, and he may find some other employment more agreeable, or another poet may enter upon the same work, and get the start of him. Therefore, my friend Horace, though I acknowledge your principle to be good, I must confess that I think the practice you would ground upon it carried to an extreme. The rigour that I exercised upon the first book, I intend to exercise upon all that follow, and have now actually advanced into the middle of the seventh, no where admitting more than one line in fifty of the first translation. You must not imagine that I had been careless and hasty in the first instance. In truth I had not; but in rendering so excellent a poet as Homer into our language, there are so many points to be attended to, both in respect of language and numbers, that a first attempt must be fortunate indeed if it does not call aloud for a second. You saw the specimen, and you saw, I am sure, one great fault in it: I mean the harshness of some of the elisions. I do not altogether take the blame of these to myself, for into some of them I was actually driven and hunted by a series of reiterated objections made by a critical friend, whose scruples and delicacies teased me out of all my patience. But no such monsters will be found in the volume.

Your brother Chester has furnished me with Barnes's Homer,<sup>1</sup> from whose notes I collect here and there some useful information, and whose fair and legible type preserves me from the danger of being as blind as was my author. I saw a sister of yours at Mr. Throckmorton's; but I am not

<sup>1</sup> Joshua Barnes (1654-1712), Greek scholar and antiquary. His edition of Homer was published in 1710. Bentley used to say of him that he 'knew as much Greek as a Greek cobbler.'





again to be admitted, is known to God only. I can say but this: that if He is still my Father, this paternal severity has toward me been such as that I have reason to account unexampled. For though others have suffered desertion, yet few, I believe, for so long a time, and perhaps none a desertion accompanied with such experiences. But they have this belonging to them, that, as they are not fit for recital, being made up merely of infernal ingredients, so neither are they susceptible of it; for I know no language in which they could be expressed. They are as truly things which it is not possible for man to utter as those were which Paul heard and saw in the third heaven. If the ladder of Christian experience reaches, as I suppose it does, to the very presence of God, it has nevertheless its foot in the abyss. And if Paul stood, as no doubt he did, in that experience of his to which I have just alluded, on the topmost round of it, I have been standing, and still stand, on the lowest, in this thirteenth year that has passed since I descended. In such a situation of mind encompassed by the midnight of absolute despair, and a thousand times filled with unspeakable horror, I first commenced an author. Distress drove me to it, and the impossibility of subsisting without some employment still recommends it. I am not, indeed, so perfectly hopeless as I was; but I am equally in need of an occupation, being often as much, and sometimes even more, worried than ever. I cannot amuse myself as I once could, with carpenters' or with gardeners' tools, or with squirrels and guinea-pigs. At that time I was a child. But since it has pleased God, whatever else He withholds, to restore to me a



OV<sup>c</sup>

1786]

TO LADY HESKETH

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could show you among them two men<sup>1</sup> whose lives, though they have but little of what we call evangelical light, are ornaments to a Christian country; men who fear God more than some who even profess to love Him. But I will not particularise farther on such a subject.

Be they what they may, our situations are so distant, and we are likely to meet so seldom, that were they, as they are not, persons of even exceptionable manners, their manners would have little to do with me. We correspond at present only on the subject of what passed at Troy three thousand years ago; and they are matters that, if they can do no good, will at least hurt nobody. Your friendship for me, and the proof that I see of it in your friendly concern for my welfare on this occasion, demanded that I should be explicit. Assure yourself that I love and honour you, as upon all accounts, so especially for the interest that you take and have ever taken in my welfare. Most sincerely I wish you all happiness in your new abode,<sup>2</sup> all possible success in your ministry, and much fruit of your newly-published labours; and am, with love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, most affectionately yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, May 25, 1786.*

I HAVE at length, my cousin, found my way into my summer abode.<sup>3</sup> I believe that I described it to

<sup>1</sup> The brothers Throckmorton, who were Roman Catholics.

<sup>2</sup> Newton had just moved from Charles Square, Hoxton, to No. 6 Coleman Street.

<sup>3</sup> The summer-house.



happened, owing to a mistake of time, that we set out half an hour sooner than usual. This mistake we discovered, while we were in the wilderness. So, finding that we had time before us, as they say, Mrs. Unwin proposed that we should go into the village, and take a view of the house that I had just mentioned to you. We did so, and found it such a one as in most respects would suit you well. But Moses Brown, our vicar, who, as I told you, is in his eighty-sixth year, is not bound to die for that reason. He said himself, when he was here last summer, that he should live ten years longer, and for aught that appears so he may; in which case, for the sake of its near neighbourhood to us, the vicarage has charms for me, that no other place can rival. But this, and a thousand things more, shall be talked over when you come.

We have been industriously cultivating our acquaintance with our Weston neighbours since I wrote last, and they on their part have been equally diligent in the same cause. I have a notion, that we shall all suit well. I see much in them both that I admire. You know, perhaps, that they are Catholics.

It is a delightful bundle of praise, my cousin, that you have sent me;—all jasmine and lavender. Whoever the lady is, she has evidently an admirable pen, and a cultivated mind. If a person reads, it is no matter in what language; and if the mind be informed, it is no matter whether that mind belongs to a man or a woman: the taste and the judgment will receive the benefit alike in both. Long before *The Task* was published, I made an experiment one day, being in a frolicksome mood,



many years, much liable to dejection; but at intervals, and sometimes for an interval of weeks, no creature would suspect it. For I have not that which commonly is a symptom of such a case belonging to me;—I mean extraordinary elevation in the absence of Mr. Bluedevil. When I am in the best health, my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality, so that I am never, at any time, exalted in proportion as I am sometimes depressed. My depression has a cause, and if that cause were to cease, I should be as cheerful thenceforth, and perhaps for ever, as any man need be. But, as I have often said, Mrs. Unwin shall be my expositor.

Adieu, my beloved cousin! God grant that our friendship which, while we could see each other, never suffered a moment's interruption, and which so long a separation has not in the least abated, may glow in us to our last hour, and be renewed in a better world, there to be perpetuated for ever!

For you must know that I should not love you half so well, if I did not believe you would be my friend to eternity. There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in full bloom, in such a nook of life as this. Therefore I am, and must, and will be,—Yours for ever, W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Olney, May 29, 1786.*

THOU dear, comfortable cousin, whose letters, among all that I receive, have this property peculiarly their own, that I expect them without trembling, and never find any thing in them that does not give me





I shall send up the sixth and seventh books of the *Iliad* shortly, and shall address them to you. You will forward them to the General. I long to show you my workshop,<sup>1</sup> and to see you sitting on the opposite side of my table. We shall be as close packed as two wax figures in an old-fashioned picture frame. I am writing in it now. It is the place in which I fabricate all my verse in summer-time. I rose an hour sooner than usual this morning, that I might finish my sheet before breakfast, for I must write this day to the General.

The grass under my windows is all bespangled with dewdrops, and the birds are singing in the apple trees, among the blossoms. Never poet had a more commodious oratory in which to invoke his Muse.

I have made your heart ache too often, my poor, dear cousin, with talking about my fits of dejection. Something has happened that has led me to the subject, or I would have mentioned them more sparingly. Do not suppose, or suspect that I treat you with reserve; there is nothing in which I am concerned that you shall not be made acquainted with. But the tale is too long for a letter. I will only add, for your present satisfaction, that the cause is not exterior, that it is not within the reach of human aid, and that yet I have a hope myself, and Mrs. Unwin a strong persuasion, of its removal. I am indeed even now, and have been for a considerable time, sensible of a change for the better, and expect, with good reason, a comfortable lift from you. Guess then, my beloved cousin, with what wishes I look forward to the time of your arrival, from whose coming I promise myself not

<sup>1</sup> The Summer-house.



minster.) If these things are so, and I am sure that you cannot gainsay a syllable of them all, then this consequence follows: that I do not promise myself more pleasure from your company than I shall be sure to find. Then you are my cousin, in whom I always delighted, and in whom I doubt not that I shall delight even to my latest hour. But this wicked coachmaker has sunk my spirits. What a miserable thing it is to depend, in any degree, for the accomplishment of a wish, and that wish so fervent, on the punctuality of a creature who, I suppose, was never punctual in his life! Do tell him, my dear, in order to quicken him, that if he performs his promise, he shall make my coach when I want one, and that if he performs it not, I will most assuredly employ some other man.

The Throckmortons sent a note to invite us to dinner; we went, and a very agreeable day we had. They made no fuss with us, which I was heartily glad to see, for where I give trouble I am sure that I cannot be welcome. Themselves, and their chaplain,<sup>1</sup> and we, were all the party. After dinner we had much cheerful and pleasant talk, the particulars of which might not perhaps be so entertaining upon paper, therefore all but one I will omit, and that I will mention only because it will of itself be sufficient to give you an insight into their opinion on a very important subject,—their own religion. I happened to say that in all professions and trades mankind affected an air of mystery. Physicians, I observed, in particular, were objects of that remark, who persist in prescribing in Latin, many times no doubt to the hazard of a patient's

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Gregson—Cowper's 'Griggy.'



letter of T. S. An unknown auxiliary having started up in my behalf, I believe I shall leave the business of answering to him, having no leisure myself for controversy. He lies very open to a very effectual reply.

My dearest cousin, adieu! I hope to write to you but once more before we meet. But oh! this coachmaker, and oh! this holiday week!—Yours, with impatient desire to see you, W. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, June 9, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The little time that I can devote to any other purpose than that of poetry is, as you may suppose, stolen. Homer is urgent. Much is done, but much remains undone, and no schoolboy is more attentive to the performance of his daily task than I am. You will therefore excuse me if at present I am both unfrequent and short.

The paper tells me that the Chancellor has relapsed, and I am truly sorry to hear it. The first attack was dangerous, but a second must be more formidable still. It is not probable that I should ever hear from him again if he survive; yet of the much that I should have felt for him, had our connection never been interrupted, I still feel much. Every body will feel the loss of a man whose abilities have made him of such general importance.

I correspond again with Colman, and upon the most friendly footing, and find in his instance, and in some others, that an intimate intercourse, which has been only casually suspended, not forfeited on



foresaw and foreknew that he would fail in his promise, and yet was disappointed; was, in truth, no more prepared for what I expected with so much reason, than if I had not at all expected it. I grumbled till we went to dinner, and at intervals till we had dined; and when dinner was over, with very little encouragement, I could actually have cried. And if I had, I should in truth have thought them tears as well bestowed as most that I have shed for many years. At first I numbered months, then weeks, then days, and was just beginning to number hours, and now I am thrown back to days again. My first speech was, after folding up your letter (for I will honestly tell you all), I am crazed with Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and St. Albans, and Totteridge, and Hadley. When is she to set out?—When is she to be here? Do tell me, for perhaps, you understand it better than I. ‘Why,’ says Mrs. Unwin (with much more composure in her air than properly belonged to her, for she also had her feelings on the occasion), ‘she sets out to-morrow se’nnight, and will be here on the Wednesday after.’ And who knows that? replied I; will the coachmaker be at all more punctual in repairing the old carriage, than in making the new one? For my part, I have no hope of seeing her this month; and if it be possible, I will not think of it, lest I should be again disappointed. And to say the truth, my dear, though hours have passed since thus I said, and I have had time for cooler consideration, the suspicion still sticks close to me, that more delays may happen. A philosopher would prepare himself for such an event, but I am no philosopher, at least when the comfort of seeing you









smart blue coat, that when I had worn it some years, I gave him, and he has now worn it some years himself. I shall set him on horseback, and order him to the Swan at Newport, there to wait your arrival, and if you should not stop at that place, as perhaps you may not, immediately to throw himself into your suite, and to officiate as your guide. For though the way from Newport hither is short, there are turnings that might puzzle your coachman; and he will be of use, too, in conducting you to our house, which otherwise you might not easily find, partly through the stupidity of those of whom you might inquire, and partly from its out-of-the-way situation. My brother drove up and down Olney in quest of us, almost as often as you up and down Chancery Lane in quest of the Madans, with fifty boys and girls at his tail, before he could find us. The first man, therefore, you shall see in a blue coat with white buttons, in the famous town of Newport, cry Kitch! He will immediately answer, My Lady! and from that moment you are sure not to be lost.

Your house shall be as clean as scrubbing and dry-rubbing can make it, and in all respects fit to receive you. My friend the Quaker, in all that I have seen of his doings, has acquitted himself much to my satisfaction. Some little things, he says, will perhaps be missing at first, in such a multiplicity, but they shall be produced as soon as called for. Mrs. U. has bought you six ducks, and is fattening them for you. She has also rummaged up a coop that will hold six chickens, and designs to people it for you by the first opportunity; for these things are not to be got fit for



TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, June 19, 1786.*

My dear cousin's arrival has, as it could not fail to do, made us happier than we ever were at Olney. Her great kindness in giving us her company is a cordial that I shall feel the effect of, not only while she is here, but while I live.

Olney will not be much longer the place of our habitation. At a village two miles distant we have hired a house of Mr. Throckmorton, a much better than we occupy at present, and yet not more expensive. It is situated very near to our most agreeable landlord, and his agreeable pleasure-grounds. In him, and in his wife, we shall find such companions as will always make the time pass pleasantly while they are in the country, and his grounds will afford us good air, and good walking room in the winter; two advantages which we have not enjoyed at Olney, where I have no neighbour with whom I can converse, and where, seven months in the year, I have been imprisoned by dirty and impassable ways, till both my health and Mrs. Unwin's have suffered materially.

Homer is ever importunate, and will not suffer me to spend half the time with my distant friends that I would gladly give them. W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Olney, July 3, 1786.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—After a long silence I begin again. A day given to my friends is a day taken from Homer, but to such an interruption, now and then occurring, I have no objection. Lady Hesketh



amends for this failure since, and in point of cheerfulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for many years.

And now I shall communicate intelligence that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the front of our abode, you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison,<sup>1</sup> and you sighed at the thought that your mother dwelt in it. Your view of it was not only just, but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purpose of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a gaol-delivery is at hand. The bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr. Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the treaty. I have my cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us; and the house is large enough to contain us, and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will, I hope, prove advantageous both to your mother and me in all respects. Here we have no neighbourhood, there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy smelling fumes

<sup>1</sup> Owing to its sham embattlements.









taking to be one of Homer's most enraptured admirers, I am not a blind one. Perhaps the speech of Achilles given in my specimen is, as you hint, rather too much in the moralising strain, to suit so young a man, and of so much fire. But whether it be or not, in the course of the close application that I am forced to give to my author, I discover inadvertencies not a few; some perhaps that have escaped even the commentators themselves; or perhaps, in the enthusiasm of their idolatry, they resolved that they should pass for beauties. Homer, however, say what they will, was man, and in all the works of man, especially in a work of such length and variety, many things will of necessity occur, that might have been better. Pope and Addison had a Dennis; and Dennis, if I mistake not, held up as he has been to scorn and detestation, was a sensible fellow, and passed some censures upon both those writers that, had they been less just, would have hurt them less.<sup>1</sup> Homer had his Zoilus; and perhaps if we knew all that Zoilus said, we should be forced to acknowledge that sometimes at least he had reason on his side. But it is dangerous to find any fault at all with what the world is determined to esteem faultless.

I rejoice, my dear friend, that you enjoy some composure and cheerfulness of spirits: may God preserve and increase to you so great a blessing!—  
I am affectionately and truly yours, W. C.

<sup>1</sup> John Dennis (1657-1734) was a critic who excited the wrath of the wits of his day; but Cowper's plea has been endorsed by others, Southey declaring that Dennis's critical pamphlets deserved republication. His plays were poor, however, and he is probably best remembered by his invention of a stage thunder, and by his ejaculation: 'The villains will play my thunder but not my plays.'







myself in consequence of it in possession of a vacant half hour, I devote it notwithstanding the indulgence granted me to be silent, to you, and the rather because I have other good news to add to that which has already given you so much pleasure, and am unwilling that a friend who interests himself so much in my well-being should wait longer than is absolutely necessary for his share of my joy.

Within this twelve months my income has received an addition of a clear £100 per annum. For a considerable part of it I am indebted to my dear cousin now on the other side of the orchard. At Florence she obtained me twenty pounds a year from Lord Cowper; since he came home she has recommended me with such good effect to his notice, that he has added twenty more, twenty she has added herself, and ten she has procured me from the William of my name whom you saw at Hartingfordbury. From my anonymous friend, who insists on not being known or guessed at, and never shall by me, I have an annuity of £50.<sup>1</sup> All these sums have accrued within this year except the first, making together as you perceive an exact century of pounds annually poured into the replenished purse of your once poor poet of Olney. Is it possible to love such a cousin too much, who so punctually fulfils

<sup>1</sup> So the £100 was made up thus :—

Lord Cowper,	.	.	.	.	.	£20
Lady Hesketh,	.	.	.	.	.	20
William Cowper of the Park,	.	.	.	.	.	10
Theodora,	.	.	.	.	.	50
						—
						£100





*July 11.*—Your mother has been asked to Gayhurst, and will be of the party the next time we go. Lady H. sends her compliments; nobody now stands so fair as yourself for her chaplainship, you need only come and enter immediately on your office.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*August 5, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am neither idle nor forgetful; on the contrary I think of you often, and my thoughts would more frequently find their way to my pen, were I not of necessity every day occupied in Homer. This long business engrosses all my mornings, and when the days grow shorter will have all my evenings too; at present they are devoted to walking, an exercise to me as necessary as my food.

You have heard of our intended removal. The house<sup>1</sup> that is to receive us is in a state of preparation, and, when finished, will be both smarter and more commodious than our present abode. But the circumstance that recommends it chiefly is its situation. Long confinement in the winter, and indeed for the most part in the autumn too, has hurt us both. A gravel walk, thirty yards long, affords but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty: yet it is all that we have had to move in for eight months in the year, during thirteen years that I have been a prisoner. Had I been confined in the Tower, the battlements of it would have furnished me with a larger space.

<sup>1</sup> Weston Lodge.







most men of large fortune, who see much company, a *cacoethes* not of *scribendi* but of *non scribendi*.

Sir Robert Throckmorton is not dead,—on the contrary, alive and likely to live the longer for having had an eresypylatose eruption. That word is so seldom in my use that I will not swear I have spelt it right. If you should be equally uncertain, consult the apothecary. Mr. Throckmorton gave me yesterday a morning call, and was very chatty and agreeable. To-day we dine there. He performs for us at Weston with the liberality of a gentleman landlord, and spares no expense to make our future residence both smart and commodious. My cousin is, for her part, lavish of all manner of good things, and sets no bounds to her kindness, so you are likely to see us next year, at all points well accommodated. You will hear from her, by the way, as soon as she hears from Mr. Hornby.

I have had a most obliging letter from Mr. Smith at Clifton, giving me an account of his recovery that afforded me, as you will believe, true pleasure, inquiring when I shall send Homer to press, and assuring me that the notice of it had raised more expectation of it in the world than he could have supposed it possible a mere notice should; and including withal a twenty pound bill for his children,—the poor.

Adieu, my dear William. Pandarus and Diomedes are on fire to combat, breakfast is ready, and the moment I have swallowed it, I must commit them in terrible conflict.

Your mother's warmest love and mine attend you and yours. My sweet cousin sends her affectionate compliments.—Ever yours, WM. COWPER.



of the poem, are admirably rendered. But because he did not express himself equally pleased with the more pedestrian parts of it, my labour therefore has been principally given to the dignification of them; not but that I have retouched considerably, and make better still, the best. In short I hope to make it all of a piece, and shall exert myself to the utmost to secure that desirable point. A storyteller, so very circumstantial as Homer, must of necessity present us often with much matter in itself capable of no other embellishment than purity of diction and harmony of versification can give to it. *Hic labor, hoc opus est.* For our language, unless it be very severely chastised, has not the terseness, nor our measure the music, of the Greek. But I shall not fail through want of industry.

We are likely to be very happy in our connection with the Throckmortons. His reserve and mine wear off, and he talks with great pleasure of the comfort that he proposes to himself from our winter-evening conversations. His purpose seems to be, that we should spend them alternately with each other. Lady Hesketh transcribes for me at present. When she is gone, Mrs. Throckmorton takes up that business, and will be my lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter. She solicited herself that office.

I will subjoin the measure of my hat. Let the new one be furnished *à la mode*.—Believe me, my dear William, truly yours,  
W. C.

Mr. Throckmorton will, I doubt not, procure Lord Petre's name, if he can, without any hint from me. He could not interest himself more in my









printed queries, unanswerable he thinks, unless in such a way as must unavoidably induce a necessity of adopting Mr. Madan's plan. But being persuaded that even I was a match for such an enemy, I ventured upon the formidable task, and gave them twenty-seven answers. Indeed a child might have done the same, and I wonder less at the author's predilection in favour of his own conceptions (which is a partiality natural enough) than that he has found, and among ministers too, understanding so scantily enlightened, or so easily perverted, as to afford them welcome entertainment.

I mourn with you over the tender conscience of your collector, whose peace of mind is so inconsistent with your interest, that he cannot think he does his duty unless he wrongs you. You think the man's meaning is good! you have a world of charity; what is it to him from whose purse the tax is taken? It is his business to gather it; when that is done, he has discharged his office. You are not quite so much like Falstaff, as he is like Mr. Dombledon, of whom Falstaff would have borrowed money, and when he refused to lend him any, the knight called him a rascally worsted stocking, yea, forsooth, knave. A tender conscience is always entitled to respect, but a scrupulous one deserves suspicion. The man may be very honest for aught I know; but I am sure you are so; and he ought to know that a man of your principles would not endeavour to force him upon a conduct incompatible with his oath.

I have endeavoured to comply with your request, though I am not good at writing upon a given subject. Your mother, however, comforts me by







I left off on Saturday, this present being Monday morning, and I renew the attempt, in hopes that I may possibly catch some subject by the end, and be more successful.

So have I seen the maids in vain  
Tumble and tease a tangled skein :  
They bite the lip, they scratch the head,  
And cry—'The deuce is in the thread !'  
They torture it, and jerk it round,  
Till the right end at last is found ;  
Then wind, and wind, and wind away,  
And what was work is changed to play.

When I wrote the first two lines, I thought I had engaged in a hazardous enterprise ; for, thought I, should my poetical vein be as dry as my prosaic, I shall spoil the sheet, and send nothing at all ; for I could on no account endure the thought of beginning again. But I think I have succeeded to admiration, and am willing to flatter myself that I have seen even a worse impromptu in the newspapers.

Though we live in a nook, and the world is quite unconscious that there are any such beings in it as ourselves, yet we are not unconcerned about what passes in it. The present awful crisis, big with the fate of England, engages much of our attention. The action is probably over by this time, and though we know it not, the grand question is decided, whether the war shall roar in our own once peaceful fields, or whether we shall still only hear of it at a distance. I can compare the nation to no similitude more apt than that of an ancient castle that had been for days assaulted by the battering ram. It was long before the stroke of that engine made any sensible impression ; but





trim than when I composed it, even in the earliest parts of my life, And what is worse than all this, I have translated it into Latin :—but that some other time.—Yours,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—How apt we are to deceive ourselves where self is in question ! you say I am in your debt, and I accounted you in mine ; a mistake to which you must attribute my arrears, if indeed I owe you any, for I am not backward to write where the uppermost thought is welcome.

I am obliged to you for all the books you have occasionally furnished me with : I did not indeed read many of Johnson's Classics ; those of established reputation are so fresh in my memory, though many years have intervened since I made them my companions, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again : and as to the minor Classics, I did not think them worth reading at all ;—I tasted most of them, and did not like them. It is a great thing to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century. Churchill,<sup>1</sup> the great Churchill, deserved the name of poet : I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first. The pitiful scribbler of his life seems to have undertaken that task, for which he was entirely

<sup>1</sup> Charles Churchill (1731-1764), a contemporary of Cowper's at Westminster School. Became curate of South Cadbury in Somersetshire, and afterwards at Rainham. Published the *Rosciad* in 1761, and discovered that his vocation was literature rather than the Church. Henceforth his gift of satire was acknowledged on all hands. *Gotham*, to which Cowper here gives his homage, was issued in 1764. Churchill is buried in St. Martin's Churchyard, Dover.



proof that he did not judge by a borrowed standard, or from rules laid down by critics, but that he was qualified to do it by his own native powers, and his great superiority of genius. For he that wrote so much, and so fast, would through inadvertency and hurry unavoidably have departed from rules which he might have found in books, but his own truly poetical talent was a guide which could not suffer him to err. A racehorse is graceful in his swiftest pace, and never makes an awkward motion though he is pushed to his utmost speed. A cart-horse might perhaps be taught to play tricks in the riding-school, and might prance and curvet like his betters, but at some unlucky time would be sure to betray the baseness of his original. It is an affair of very little consequence perhaps to the well-being of mankind, but I cannot help regretting that he died so soon. Those words of Virgil, upon the immature death of Marcellus, might serve for his epitaph :

*‘ Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra  
Esse sinent.’*

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

*Olney, Aug. 31, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I began to fear for your health, and every day said to myself,—I must write to Bagot soon, if it be only to ask him how he does,—a measure that I should certainly have pursued long since had I been less absorbed in Homer than I am. But such are my engagements in that quarter, that they make me, I think, good for little else.







together with his strictures. Assure him likewise that I will endeavour by the closest attention to all the peculiarities of my original, to save him as much trouble as I can, hereafter. I now perfectly understand what it is that he requires in a translator of Homer, and being convinced of the justness of his demands, will attempt at least to conform to them. Some escapes will happen in so long a work, which he will know how to account for and to pardon. I have been employed a considerable time in the correction of the first seven books, and have not yet begun the ninth, but shall in a day or two; and will send it as soon as finished.—I am, sir, your most humble servant,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Olney, Sept. 24, 1786.*

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—So interesting a concern as your tutorship of the young gentleman in question cannot have been so long in a state of indecision without costing you much anxiety. We have sympathised with you under it all, but are glad to be informed that the long delay is not chargeable upon Mr. Hornby. Bishops are *κακὰ θηρία, γαστέρες ἀργαί*.—You have heard, I know, from Lady Hesketh, and she has exculpated me from all imputation of wilful silence, from which, indeed, of yourself you are so good as to discharge me, in consideration of my present almost endless labour. I have nothing to say in particular on the subject of Homer, except that I am daily advancing in the work with all the despatch that a due concern for my own credit in the result will allow.





it would be at any rate), because she sent him not long before a letter conceived in such strains of piety and spirituality as ought to have convinced him that she at least was no wanderer. But what is the fact, and how do we spend our [time] in reality? What are the deeds for which we have been represented as thus criminal? Our present course of life differs in nothing from that which we have both held these thirteen years, except that, after great civilities shown us, and many advances made on the part of the Throcks, we visit them. That we visit also at Gayhurst; that we have frequently taken airings with my cousin in her carriage; and that I have sometimes taken a walk with her on a Sunday evening and sometimes by myself, which, however, your mother has never done. These are the only novelties in our practice; and if by these procedures, so inoffensive in themselves, we yet give offence, offence must needs be given. God and our own consciences acquit us, and we acknowledge no other judges.

The two families with whom we have kicked up this astonishing intercourse are as harmless in their conversation and manners as can be found anywhere. And as to my poor cousin, the only crime that she is guilty of against the people of Olney is, that she has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and administered comfort to the sick;—except indeed that, by her great kindness, she has given us a little lift in point of condition and circumstances, and has thereby excited envy in some who have not the knack of rejoicing in the prosperity of others. And this I take to be the root of the matter.

My dear William, I do not know that I should



been grieved, they have been misinformed ; which is the more probable, because the bearers of intelligence hence to London are not always very scrupulous concerning the truth of their reports ; and that if any of our serious neighbours have been astonished, they have been so without the smallest real occasion. Poor people are never well employed even when they judge one another ; but when they undertake to scan the motives and estimate the behaviour of those whom Providence has exalted a little above them, they are utterly out of their province and their depth. They often see us get into Lady Hesketh's carriage, and rather uncharitably suppose that it always carries us into a scene of dissipation, which, in fact, it never does. We visit, indeed, at Mr. Throckmorton's, and at Gayhurst ; rarely, however, at Gayhurst, on account of the greater distance : more frequently, though not very frequently, at Weston, both because it is nearer, and because our business in the house that is making ready for us often calls us that way. The rest of our journeys are to Bozeat turnpike and back again ; or, perhaps, to the cabinet-maker's at Newport. As Othello says,

‘ The very head and front of my offending  
Hath this extent, no more.’

What good we can get or can do in these visits, is another question,—which they, I am sure, are not at all qualified to solve. Of this we are both sure, that under the guidance of Providence we have formed these connections ; that we should have hurt the Christian cause, rather than have served it, by a prudish abstinence from them ; and that St. Paul



of duty, and by continual prayer.—Yours, my dear friend,  
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—The fish happening to swim uppermost in my mind, I give it the precedence, and begin with returning our thanks for it, not forgetting the circumstance of free carriage. Upon the whole, I think this a handsomer way of acknowledging a present than to tuck it into a postscript.

I find the *Register* in all respects an entertaining medley; but especially in this, that it has brought to my view some long forgotten pieces of my own production;—I mean by the way two or three. These I have marked with my own initials, and you may be sure I found them peculiarly agreeable, as they had not only the grace of being mine, but that of novelty likewise to recommend them. It is at least twenty years since I saw them. You, I think, was never a dabbler in rhyme. I have been one ever since I was fourteen years of age, when I began with translating an elegy of Tibullus. I have no more right to the name of a poet than a maker of mouse-traps has to that of an engineer; but my little exploits in this way have at times amused me so much, that I have often wished myself a good one. Such a talent in verse as mine is like a child's rattle,—very entertaining to the trifler that uses it, and very disagreeable to all beside. But it has served to rid me of some melancholy moments, for I only take it up as a gentleman performer does his fiddle. I have this peculiarity belonging to me as a rhymist, that though I am charmed to a great degree with my own work, while it is on the anvil, I can









TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Weston Underwood, Nov. 17, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—My usual time of answering your letters having been unavoidably engrossed by occasions that would not be thrust aside, I have been obliged to postpone the payment of my debt for a whole week. Even now it is not without some difficulty that I discharge it; which you will easily believe, when I tell you that this is only the second day that has seen us inhabitants of our new abode. When God speaks to a chaos, it becomes a scene of order and harmony in a moment; but when his creatures have thrown one house into confusion by leaving it, and another by tumbling themselves and their goods into it, not less than many days' labour and contrivance is necessary to give them their proper places. And it belongs to furniture of all kinds, however convenient it may be in its place, to be a nuisance out of it. We find ourselves here in a comfortable dwelling. Such it is in itself; and my cousin, who has spared no expense in dressing it up for us, has made it a genteel one. Such, at least, it will be when its contents are a little harmonised. She left us on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, in the evening, Mrs. Unwin and I took possession. I could not help giving a last look to my old prison and its precincts; and though I cannot easily account for it, having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heart-ache when I took my last leave of a scene, that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu



reported there, and has been indeed for some time, that I am turned Papist. You will know how to treat a lie like this which proves nothing but the malignity of its author; but other tales you may possibly hear that will not so readily refute themselves. This, however, I trust you will always find true, that neither Mrs. Unwin nor myself shall have so conducted ourselves in our new neighbourhood, as that you shall have any occasion to be grieved on our account.

Mr. Unwin has been ill of a fever at Winchester, but by a letter from Mr. Thornton we learn that he is recovering, and hopes soon to travel. His Mrs. Unwin has joined him at that place.

Adieu, my dear friend. Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances and mine conclude me ever yours,  
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Weston Lodge, Nov. 26, 1786.*

It is my birthday, my beloved cousin, and I determine to employ a part of it, that it may not be destitute of festivity, in writing to you. The dark, thick fog that has obscured it, would have been a burthen to me at Olney, but here I have hardly attended to it. The neatness and snugness of our abode compensate all the dreariness of the season, and whether the ways are wet or dry, our house at least is always warm and commodious. Oh for you, my cousin, to partake these comforts with us! I will not begin already to tease you upon that subject, but Mrs. Unwin remembers to have heard from your own lips, that you hate London in the spring. Perhaps therefore



the cliff, is no cliff, nor at all like one, but a beautiful terrace, sloping gently down to the Ouse, and from the brow of which, though not lofty, you have a view of such a valley as makes that which you see from the hills near Olney, and which I have had the honour to celebrate, an affair of no consideration.

Wintry as the weather is, do not suspect that it confines me. I ramble daily, and every day change my ramble. Wherever I go, I find short grass under my feet, and when I have travelled perhaps five miles come home with shoes not at all too dirty for a drawing-room. I was pacing yesterday under the elms, that surround the field in which stands the great alcove,<sup>1</sup> when lifting my eyes I saw two black genteel figures bolt through a hedge into the path where I was walking. You guess already who they were, and that they could be nobody but our neighbours. They had seen me from a hill at a distance, and had traversed a great turnip-field to get at me. You see therefore, my dear, that I am in some request. Alas! in too much request with some people. The verses of Cadwallader have found me at last.

I am charmed with your account of our little cousin <sup>2</sup> at Kensington. If the world does not spoil him hereafter, he will be a valuable man.

Good night, and may God bless thee. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Dec. 4, 1786.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—It distresses me to think that this cannot reach you before the newspapers

<sup>1</sup> See *The Task*, Book I., 278.

<sup>2</sup> 'Our little cousin' would be George Augustus, afterwards fourth Earl Cowper (1776-1799), who was at this time ten years of age.









or noticed for a long time after his first appearance, and then made noise enough. I have a letter from a Mr. Biddlecombe of Somerford, near Christ Church, in the New Forest, expressive of the pleasure that my volumes have given to him, and inviting me to visit him, if I should ever find myself in that part of Hampshire. I answer it by this post. You shall see it, my dear, as soon as I can send it franked. I am obliged also to write to Mr. H. Thornton by this post, which occasions you a shorter letter; but I have still something to say. I have finished the twelfth book, and when Mr. Throckmorton and I were walking together on Friday morning, I told him that I had a design to call upon Mrs. T. for her obliging and kind offer made me last summer. He immediately recollected it, and said with a smile—‘You mean, I suppose, to transcribe for you? She will do it with great pleasure.’—The next morning I sent her that same twelfth book, and understand that she has been hard at work. Unfortunately they leave the country on Tuesday, so that she will not be able, I suppose, to finish. She told me however this minute, when she stopped on horseback at the gate, that she had transcribed eleven pages. He was with me when she called, and they are gone together to Gayhurst.

Adieu, my precious! I am going to refresh myself with air and sunshine this fine morning, having been imprisoned all yesterday by the rain.  
—Ever your affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

We shall be forced to trouble you, my coz, on this sad occasion. Mrs. U. begs that you will be



































by some untoward accident delayed, came not till yesterday. It came however, and has relieved me from a thousand distressing apprehensions on your account.

'The dew of your intelligence has refreshed my poetical laurels. A little praise now and then is very good for your hard-working poet, who is apt to grow languid, and perhaps careless without it. Praise, I find, affects us as money does. The more a man gets of it, with the more vigilance he watches over and preserves it. Such at least is its effect on me, and you may assure yourself that I will never lose a mite of it for want of care.

I have already invited the good Padre<sup>1</sup> in general terms, and he shall positively dine here next week, whether he will or not. I do not at all suspect that his kindness to Protestants has any thing insidious in it, any more than I suspect that he transcribes Homer for me with a view for my conversion. He would find me a tough piece of business, I can tell him; for when I had no religion at all, I had yet a terrible dread of the Pope. How much more now!

I should have sent you a longer letter, but was obliged to devote my last evening to the melancholy employment of composing a Latin inscription for the tombstone<sup>2</sup> of poor William, two copies of which I wrote out and enclosed, one to Henry Thornton, and one to Mr. Newton. Homer stands by me biting his thumbs, and swears that if I do not leave

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Gregson.

<sup>2</sup> Unwin was buried in Winchester Cathedral, where the stone may still be seen.



of them being fitted up with a screw that was useless, I have consigned to proper hands, that it may be made as serviceable as its brother. They are very neat, and I account them a great acquisition. Our carpenter assures me that the lameness of the chairs was not owing to any injury received in their journey, but that the maker never properly finished them. They were not high when they came, and in order to reduce them to a level, we have lowered them an inch. Thou knowest, child, that the short foot could not be lengthened, for which reason we shortened the long ones. The box containing the plate and the brooms reached us yesterday, and nothing had suffered the least damage by the way. Every thing is smart, every thing is elegant, and we admire them all. The short candlesticks are short enough. I am now writing with those upon the table; Mrs. U. is reading opposite, and they suit us both exactly. With the money that you have in hand, you may purchase, my dear, at your most convenient time, a tea-urn; that which we have at present having never been handsome, and being now old and patched. A parson once, as he walked across the parlour, pushed it down with his belly, and it never perfectly recovered itself. We want likewise a tea-waiter, meaning, if you please, such a one as you may remember to have seen at the Hall, a wooden one. To which you may add, from the same fund, three or four yards of yard-wide muslin, wherewithal to make neckcloths for my worship. If after all these disbursements any thing should be left in the bottom of the purse, we shall be obliged to you if you will expend it in the purchase of silk







## TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

*Weston, Jan. 3, 1787.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You wish to hear from me at any calm interval of epic frenzy. An interval presents itself, but whether calm or not, is perhaps doubtful. Is it possible for a man to be calm, who for three weeks past has been perpetually occupied in slaughter,—letting out one man's bowels, smiting another through the gullet, transfixing the liver of another, and lodging an arrow in the buttock of a fourth? Read the thirteenth book of the *Iliad*, and you will find such amusing incidents as these the subject of it, the sole subject. In order to interest myself in it, and to catch the spirit of it, I had need discard all humanity. It is woeful work; and were the best poet in the world to give us at this day such a list of killed and wounded, he would not escape universal censure, to the praise of a more enlightened age be it spoken. I have waded through much blood, and through much more I must wade before I shall have finished. I determine in the mean time to account it all very sublime, and for two reasons,—First, because all the learned think so; and secondly, because I am to translate it. But were I an indifferent by-stander, perhaps I should venture to wish that Homer had applied his wonderful powers to a less disgusting subject. He has in the *Odyssey*, and I long to get at it.

I have not the good fortune to meet with any of these fine things, that you say are printed in my praise. But I learn from certain advertisements in the *Morning Herald*, that I make a conspicuous





## TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, Jan. 8, 1787.*

I HAVE had a little nervous fever lately, my dear, that has somewhat abridged my sleep; and though I find myself better to-day than I have been since it seized me, yet I feel my head lightish, and not in the best order for writing. You will find me, therefore, perhaps not only less alert in my manner than I usually am when my spirits are good, but rather shorter. I will however proceed to scribble till I find that it fatigues me, and then will do as I know you would bid me do were you here, shut up my desk, and take a walk.

The good General tells me that in the eight first books which I have sent him, he still finds alterations and amendments necessary, of which I myself am equally persuaded; and he asks my leave to lay them before an intimate friend of his, of whom he gives a character that bespeaks him highly deserving such a trust. To this I have no objection, desiring only to make the translation as perfect as I can make it. If God grant me life and health, I would spare no labour to secure that point. The General's letter is extremely kind, and both for matter and manner like all the rest of his dealings with his cousin the poet.

I had a letter also yesterday from Mr. Smith, member for Nottingham. Though we never saw each other, he writes to me in the most friendly terms, and interests himself much in my Homer, and in the success of my subscription. Speaking on this latter subject he says that my poems are read by hundreds who know nothing of my pro-



the only creatures in the world that are truly good ; and then they will see again, and see them improved : therefore then they regret not. Regret is for the living. What we get, we soon lose ; and what we lose, we regret. The most obvious consolation in this case seems to be, that we who regret others, shall quickly become objects of regret ourselves ; for mankind are continually passing off in a rapid succession.

I have many kind friends, who, like yourself, wish that, instead of turning my endeavours to a translation of Homer, I had proceeded in the way of original poetry. But I can truly say that it was ordered otherwise, not by me, but by the Providence that governs all my thoughts, and directs my intentions as He pleases. It may seem strange, but it is true, that after having written a volume, in general with great ease to myself, I found it impossible to write another page. The mind of man is not a fountain, but a cistern ; and mine, God knows, a broken one. It is my creed, that the intellect depends as much, both for the energy and the multitude of its exertions, upon the operations of *God's* agency upon it, as the heart, for the exercise of its graces, upon the influence of the Holy Spirit. According to this persuasion, I may very reasonably affirm, that it was not God's pleasure that I should proceed in the same track, because He did not enable me to do it. A whole year I waited and waited in circumstances of mind that made a state of non-employment peculiarly irksome to me. I longed for the pen, as the only remedy, but I could find no subject ; extreme distress of spirit at last drove me, as, if I mistake not, I told you some







benefactors I seem to forget, though, in fact, I do not forget him, but have the warmest sense of his kindness. I shall be happy, if it please God to spare my life till an opportunity may offer, to take him by the hand at Weston.

Mrs. Carter thinks on the subject of dreams as everybody else does, that is to say, according to her own experience. She has had no extraordinary ones, and therefore accounts them only the ordinary operations of the fancy. Mine are of a texture that will not suffer me to ascribe them to so inadequate a cause, or to any cause but the operation of an exterior agency. I have a mind, my dear (and to you I will venture to boast of it), as free from superstition as any man living, neither do I give heed to dreams in general as predictive, though particular dreams I believe to be so. Some very sensible persons, and I suppose Mrs. Carter among them, will acknowledge that in old times God spoke by dreams, but affirm with much boldness that He has since ceased to do so. If you ask them why? they answer, because He has now revealed His will in the Scripture, and there is no longer any need that He should instruct or admonish us by dreams. I grant that with respect to doctrines and precepts He has left us in want of nothing; but has He thereby precluded Himself in any of the operations of His Providence? Surely not. It is perfectly a different consideration; and the same need that there ever was of His interference in this way, there is still, and ever must be, while man continues blind and fallible, and a creature beset with dangers which he can neither foresee nor obviate. His operations however of this kind are, I allow, very





fessors for my two volumes. His name is Rose,<sup>1</sup> an Englishman. Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present, therefore I send it. Adieu, very affectionately,  
W. C.

Shortly after the date of this letter Cowper again became deranged. This fourth derangement lasted six months.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

*Weston, July 24, 1787.*

DEAR SIR,—This is the first time I have written these six months, and nothing but the constraint of obligation could induce me to write now. I cannot be so wanting to myself as not to endeavour at least to thank you both for the visits with which you have favoured me, and the poems that you sent me; in my present state of mind I taste nothing; nevertheless I read, partly from habit, and partly because it is the only thing that I am capable of.

I have therefore read Burns's poems,<sup>2</sup> and have read them twice; and though they be written in a language that is new to me, and many of them on subjects much inferior to the author's ability, I think them on the whole a very extraordinary production. He is I believe the only poet these kingdoms have produced in the lower rank of life since Shakespeare,

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Rose, soon to become one of Cowper's most valued friends.

<sup>2</sup> About the time that Cowper was reading Burns, Burns was reading Cowper. Burns used often to carry *The Task* in his pocket. To Mrs Dunlop he writes: 'How do you like Cowper? Is not *The Task* a glorious poem? The religion of *The Task*, baiting a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and nature: the religion that exalts, that ennobles men.'



improved, and I once more associate with my neighbours. My head, however, has been the worst part of me, and still continues so,—is subject to giddiness and pain, maladies very unfavourable to poetical employment; but a preparation of the bark, which I take regularly, has so far been of service to me in those respects, as to encourage in me a hope that by perseverance in the use of it, I may possibly find myself qualified to resume the translation of Homer.

When I cannot walk, I read, and read perhaps more than is good for me. But I cannot be idle. The only mercy that I show myself in this respect is that I read nothing that requires much closeness of application. I lately finished the perusal of a book, which in former years I have more than once attacked, but never till now conquered; some other book always interfered before I could finish it. The work I mean is Barclay's<sup>1</sup> *Argenis*; and if ever you allow yourself to read for mere amusement, I can recommend it to you (provided you have not already perused it) as the most amusing romance that ever was written. It is the only one indeed of an old date that I ever had the patience to go through with. It is interesting in a high degree; richer in incident than can be imagined, full of surprises, which the reader never forestalls, and yet free from all entanglement and confusion. The style too appears to me to be such as would not dishonour Tacitus himself.

Poor Burns loses much of his deserved praise in this country through our ignorance of his language.

<sup>1</sup> John Barclay (1582-1621). His *Argenis* is a Latin satire containing clever allusions to the state of France during the time of the League.







*Mémoires* of Baron de Tott;<sup>1</sup> Fenn's *Original Letters*;<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of Frederic of Bohemia*;<sup>3</sup> and am now reading *Mémoires d'Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise*.<sup>4</sup> I have also read Barclay's *Argenis*, a Latin romance, and the best romance that ever was written. All these, together with Madan's *Letters to Priestley*,<sup>5</sup> and several pamphlets, within these two months. So I am a great reader.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, Sept. 8, 1787.*

I CONTINUE to write, as you perceive, my dearest cousin, though, in compassion for my pate, you advised me for the present to abstain:—in reality I have no need, at least I believe not, of any such caution. Those jarrings that made my scull feel like a broken egg-shell, and those twirls that I spoke of, have been removed by an infusion of the

<sup>1</sup> Baron François de Tott (1733-93), son of a Hungarian nobleman, for many years in the service of the Porte. His work *Mémoires sur les Turcs et Tartares* appeared at Amsterdam in 1784. English versions of it appeared in London (1785), Dublin (1785), and London (1786). See Cowper's letter of 29 Sept. 1787.

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Fenn (1739-1794) edited *Original Letters of the Reign of Henry VI.*, etc., 1787-1823. These are now known as the *Paston Letters*.

<sup>3</sup> *Frederic of Bohemia*. The Editor can only trace the following book, which certainly Cowper never saw:—*Letters to King James VI. from the Queen, Prince Charles, the Princess Elizabeth, and her husband, Frederick, King of Bohemia*. Edited from the originals in the Faculty of Advocates. Published by the Maitland Club, 1835.

<sup>4</sup> Henri II. of Lorraine, Duke of Guise (1614-64). His *Mémoires* were issued in 1661, Englished in 1669, under the title—*Les Mémoires de Feu Monsieur le Duc de Guise*. Paris, 1668; Cologne, 1669. *Les Mémoires d'Henry de Lorraine, Duc de Guise*. Paris 1681. Henry II. of Lorraine, fifth of Guise, was the son of Charles of Lorraine, Duke of Guise.

<sup>5</sup> Madan's *Letters to Joseph Priestley*. London, 1787.









her good sense are charming, insomuch that even I, who was never much addicted to speech-making, and who at present find myself particularly indisposed to it, could not help saying at parting, I am glad that I have seen you, and sorry that I have seen so little of you. We were sometimes many in company; on Thursday we were fifteen, but we had not altogether so much vivacity and cleverness as Miss Jekyll, whose talent at mirth-making has this rare property to recommend it that nobody suffers by it.

We have this day been inquiring after the lost bedstead. We sent Sam to Olney, with orders if he found not John Rogers there to proceed to Sherrington in quest of him. But at Olney he was informed that on this day (Saturday) he always goes to Northampton. On Monday, however, we shall be sure to find him at Olney, when the proper inquiries shall be made. The waggoners, in the meantime, whom Samuel actually saw and conversed with about it, declare that they have no remembrance of any such thing having at any time been sent to their inn in London. We are on the whole rather inclined at present to suspect that the fault must lie with the upholsterer.

A thousand thanks, my dear, for my waistcoat, which I wore the last time I dined at the Hall, to the great admiration of the ladies. It is perfectly genteel and elegant.

I am making a gravel walk for winter use, under a warm hedge in the orchard. It shall be furnished with a low seat for your accommodation, and if you do but like it I shall be satisfied. In wet weather, or rather after wet weather, when the







time the rich and the poor rejoice in the expectation of you ; to whom may be added a third sort,—ourselves for instance, who are of neither of those descriptions. Mrs. Unwin bids me present her love to you in the most affectionate terms, and says, Pray tell Lady Hesketh that all our featherbeds are used by turns.

I rejoice that Bully is so merry, and long to see him. Remember me kindly to Jocky. The *Marquis* is dead, and is succeeded by a *Beau*.—I received a letter yesterday, enclosing a Bank-note, and copy it for your edification :—

SIR,—A friend of yours, hearing where you reside, begs your acceptance of a ten pound note.—I am,  
sir, &c.

*Est-ce par hazard le Monsieur Dalling dont vous m'avez jadis fait le récit ?*

Yours, my beloved cousin,—WM. COWPER.

#### TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT

*Weston Underwood, Sept. 22, 1787.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Not well, but better. I take an early opportunity to tell you that I am so. Perhaps I might have sent you a more satisfactory account of myself, had I postponed my letter yet a season ; but Mrs. Unwin having engaged for me that I should write to you *myself* as soon as I should find myself able to do so, and my inclination prompting me to do it likewise, here I am. When I saw you I could not speak to you ; now I can write to you, an alteration at least so much for the better as will serve to gratify the kindness of your













Mrs. Chester<sup>1</sup> paid her first visit here last Saturday, a prelude, no doubt, to the visit that she intends to you. I was angry with her for her omission of a civility to which you are so highly entitled; but now that she discovers symptoms of repentance, feel myself inclined to pardon her. She is one of those women, indeed, to whom one pardons everything the moment they appear,—not handsome, but showing a gentleness in her countenance, voice, and manner, that speaks irresistibly in her favour.

Your newspaper, for which I thank you, my cousin, pleases me more than any that I have seen lately. The pertness of the *Herald* is my detestation, yet I always read it; and why? because it is a newspaper, and should therefore doubtless read it were it ten times more disgusting than it is. Fielding was the only man who ever attempted to be witty with success in a newspaper, and even he could not support it long. But he led the way in his *Covent Garden Journal*, and a thousand blockheads have followed him. I am not pleased, however, with that furious attack upon the poor Abbé Mann. The zealous Protestant who makes it, discovers too much of that spirit which he charges upon the Papists. The poor Abbé's narrative was in a manner extorted from him; and when I read it, instead of finding it insidious and hostile to the interests of the Church of England, I was foolish enough to think it discreet, modest, temperate. The gentleman, therefore, has either more zeal, or a better nose at a plot, than I have.

The bedstead, my dear, suffered nothing by the

<sup>1</sup> Of Chicheley.



























promising me my wish only to disappoint me, and none but the king and his ministers can tell when you and I shall come together. I hope, however, that the period, though so often postponed, is not far distant, and that once more I shall behold you, and experience your power to make winter gay and sprightly.

I have never forgotten (I never say forgot) to tell you the reason why Mr. Bull did not fulfil his engagement to call on you on his return from the West. It was owing to an accident that happened to one of those legs of his. At Exmouth he chose to wallow in the sea and made use of a bathing machine for that purpose. It has a ladder, as you know, attached to its tail. On the lowermost step of that ladder he stood, when it broke under him. He fell of course, and with his knee on the point of a large nail which pierced it almost to the depth of two inches. The consequence was that when he reached London he could think of nothing but getting home as fast as possible. The wound has been healed some time but is occasionally still painful, so that he is not without apprehensions that it may open again, which, considering that he is somewhat gross in his habit, is not impossible. But I have just sent to invite him to dine with us on Monday.

I have a kitten, my dear, the drollest of all creatures that ever wore a cat's skin. Her gambols are not to be described, and would be incredible if they could. She tumbles head over heels several times together, she lays her cheek to the ground and presents her rump at you with an air of most supreme disdain, from this posture she rises to dance







This is a comfort on which I have only one drawback; and it is the reflection that I make without being able to help it, on the style and nature of my constant experience, which has taught me that what I hope for with most pleasure, is the very thing in which I am most likely to meet with a disappointment;—but sufficient to the past is the evil thereof; let futurity speak for itself.

On Monday last—for headaches and other matters prevented our going sooner—Mrs. Throck. carried us to Chicheley, viz. Mr. Chester's. It seemed as if all the world was there to meet us, though in fact there was not above half of it, their own family, which is very numerous, excepted. The Bishop of Norwich was there, that is to say, the little Doctor Lewis Bagot<sup>1</sup> and his lady. She is handsome, and he in all respects what a Bishop should be. Besides these, Mrs. Praed<sup>2</sup> was there, and her sister, Miss Backwell. There might be many others, but if there were I overlooked them. 'Foresaid little Bishop and I had much talk about many things, but most about Homer. I have not room to particularise, and will therefore sum up the whole with observing, that both with respect to our ideas of the original, of Pope's translation, and of the sort of translation that is wanted, we were perfectly at an agreement. As to the house, it is handsome, so is the pleasure-ground, and so are all the gardens, which are not less, I believe,

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Bagot (1740-1802) was educated at Westminster, and was one of Cowper's schoolfellows. He married Miss Hay, niece of the Earl of Kinnoul. He became Bishop of Norwich in 1783, and Bishop of St. Asaph in 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Of Tyringham. Elizabeth and Sarah Backwell of Tyringham were co-heiresses. In 1778 Elizabeth married William Praed, Esq.









profoundest veneration. But the serious fact is, that the papers distinguished by those signatures have ever pleased me most, and struck me as the work of a sensible man, who knows the world well, and has more of Addison's delicate humour than anybody.

A poor man begged food at the Hall lately. The cook gave him some vermicelli soup. He ladled it about sometime with the spoon, and then returned it to her saying, 'I am a poor man it is true, and I am very hungry, but yet I cannot eat broth with maggots in it.' Once more, my dear, a thousand thanks for your box full of good things, useful things, and beautiful things.—Yours ever,  
W. C.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, Dec. 4, 1787.*

I AM glad, my dearest Coz, that my last letter proved so diverting. You may assure yourself of the literal truth of the whole narration, and that however droll, it was not in the least indebted to any embellishments of mine.

You say well, my dear, that in Mr. Throckmorton we have a peerless neighbour; we have so. In point of information upon all important subjects, in respect too of expression and address, and in short, every thing that enters into the idea of a gentleman, I have not found his equal, not often, anywhere. Were I asked who in my judgment approaches nearest to him in all his amiable qualities and qualifications, I should certainly answer his brother, George, who if he be not his exact counter-







us the pain of an invitation, for a pain it would have been. And why? as Sternhold says,—because, as Hopkins answers, we must have refused it. But it fell out singularly enough, that this ball was held, of all days in the year, on my birthday—and so I told them—but not till it was all over.

Though I have thought proper never to take any notice of the arrival of my MSS., together with the *other good things* in the box, yet certain it is that I received them. I have furbished up the tenth book till it is as bright as silver, and am now occupied in bestowing the same labour upon the eleventh. The twelfth and thirteenth are in the hands of —, and the fourteenth and fifteenth are ready to succeed them. This notable job is the delight of my heart, and how sorry shall I be when it is ended.

The smith and the carpenter, my dear, are both in the room hanging a bell; if I therefore make a thousand blunders, let the said intruders answer for them all.

I thank you, my dear, for your history of the G—s. What changes in that family! And how many thousand families have in the same time experienced changes as violent as theirs! The course of a rapid river is the justest of all emblems, to express the variableness of our scene below. Shakspeare says, none ever bathed himself twice in the same stream, and it is equally true that the world upon which we close our eyes at night is never the same with that on which we open them in the morning.

I do not always say, give my love to my uncle, because he knows that I always love him. I do not













































forgotten ; for all the subsequent hours are devoted to Homer.

Mr. Throckmorton told me that he would call on you if it were possible, but his business (whatever it may have been, for I know not) lying among the lawyers, and consequently very remote from you, seemed to make it doubtful whether he would have an opportunity or not. I therefore did not mention to you his intention ; but it gave me great pleasure to find that he had executed it. If it were not more than almost a Bull, I would say that we have lived with him ever since he has been gone. Twice we have dined at his house, once we drank tea there, and I have made morning calls and have walked with them into the bargain. I forgot, my coz, to tell you in my last what, since you have seen him, it will be of very little use to mention, that his brother Charles is lately married, and that he and his bride are gone with the youngest brother Francis to Lisbon. Francis I have never seen, and understanding that he is an amiable young man and probably short-lived, am glad that I never have.

The day before yesterday, I saw for the first time Bunbury's<sup>1</sup> new print, the *Propagation of a Lie*. Mr. Throckmorton sent it for the amusement of our party. Bunbury sells humour by the yard, and is, I suppose, the first vender of it who ever did so. He cannot therefore be said to have humour without measure (pardon a pun, my dear, from a man who has not made one before, these forty years), though he may certainly be said to be immeasurably droll.

<sup>1</sup> Bunbury, Henry William (1750-1811), a caricaturist, who was educated at Westminster school.



not I will give it you in my next. At present I will add no more, because I cannot, than that I am, with Mrs. Unwin's best love, most truly yours,  
my dearest cousin,

WM. COWPER.

It has happened twice that I have written, as I do now, on a Friday, and have dated my letter accordingly, though you could not possibly receive it till Monday. This has occasioned an appearance of unnecessary delay, though in reality there has been none.—My best respects to Mrs. Hill when you see her next.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Jan. 21, 1788.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your last letter informed us that you were likely to be much occupied for some time in writing on a subject that must be interesting to a person of your feelings,—the Slave Trade. I was unwilling to interrupt your progress in so good a work, and have therefore enjoined myself a longer silence than I should otherwise have thought excusable; though, to say the truth, did not our once intimate fellowship in the things of God recur to my remembrance, and present me with something like a warrant for doing it, I should hardly prevail with myself to write at all. Letters such as mine, to a person of a character such as yours, are like snow in harvest; and you well say, that if I will send you a letter that you can answer, I shall make your part of the business easier than it is. This I would gladly do; but though I abhor a



understand, no engagements elsewhere, he will doubtless be happy to obtain a lasting one in this country. What acceptance he finds among the people of Ravenstone I have not heard; but at Olney, where he has preached once, he was hailed as the sun by the Greenlanders after half a year of lamp light. The *connoisseurs* in preaching, or rather perhaps in preachers, affirm that he resembles Mr. Whitefield more than any man ever did, *save and except himself the said Mr. Whitefield*. Thus they speak of him at present; but the same persons had nearly the same opinion of Mr. Page,<sup>1</sup> of wife-beating memory, for which reason I find myself rather slow to suppose them infallible.

Providence interposed to preserve me from the heaviest affliction that I can now suffer, or I had lately lost Mrs. Unwin, and in a way the most shocking imaginable. Having kindled her fire in the room where she dresses (an office that she always performs herself), she placed the candle on the hearth, and, kneeling, addressed herself to her devotions. A thought struck her, while thus occupied, that the candle being short might possibly catch her clothes. She pinched it out with the tongs, and set it on the table. In a few minutes the chamber was so filled with smoke that her eyes watered, and it was hardly possible to see across it. Supposing that it proceeded from the chimney, she pushed the billets backwards, and while she did so, casting her eye downward, perceived that her bed-gown was on fire. In fact, before she extinguished the candle, the mischief that she apprehended was begun; and when she related the

<sup>1</sup> Rev. B. Page, the curate of Olney who succeeded Newton,











am in reality so far from thinking myself an ass, and my translation a sand-cart, that I rather seem, in my own account of the matter, one of those flaming steeds harnessed to the chariot of Apollo, of which we read in the works of the ancients. I have lately, I know not how, acquired a certain superiority to myself in this business, and in this last revisal have elevated the expression to a degree far surpassing its former boast. A few evenings since I had an opportunity to try how far I might venture to expect such success of my labours as can alone repay them, by reading the first book of my *Iliad* to a friend of ours. He dined with you once at Olney. His name is Greatheed,<sup>1</sup> a man of letters and of taste. He dined with us, and the evening proving dark and dirty, we persuaded him to take a bed. I entertained him as I tell you. He heard me with great attention, and with evident symptoms of the highest satisfaction, which, when I had finished the exhibition, he put out of all doubt by expressions which I cannot repeat. Only this he said to Mrs. Unwin while I was in another room, that he had never entered into the spirit of Homer before, nor had anything like a due conception of his manner. This I have said, knowing that it will please you, and will now say no more.

Adieu!—my dear, will you never speak of coming to Weston more?  
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, Feb. 7, 1788.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—Thanks beforehand for the books which you give me to expect. They will

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Samuel Greatheed of Newport-Pagnell.







on horseback. His horse he left at an inn on the Lambeth side of Westminster Bridge. Thence he proceeded to the Bishop's, and from the Bishop's to Mr. Scott. Having finished this last visit he begged Mr. Scott's company to the inn where he had left his horse, which he said was at the foot of *London* Bridge. Thither they went, but neither the inn nor the horse were there. Then, says Postlethwaite, it must be at Blackfriars' Bridge that I left it. Thither also they went, but to as little purpose. Luckily for him there was but one more bridge, and there they found it. To make the poor youth amends for all these misadventures, it so happened that the incumbent, his predecessor, died before the crops of last year were reaped. The whole profits of that year, by consequence, go into P.'s pocket, which was never so stuffed before.

Good night, my dearest coz. Mrs. Unwin's love attends you.—Affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

There now enters upon the stage another figure, Mrs. King,<sup>1</sup> wife of the Rev. John King, Rector of Pertenhall, Beds. She had been a friend of Cowper's brother John, and having read *The Task*, took upon herself to write to the poet. This was the beginning of a very pleasant friendship.

TO MRS. KING

*Weston Lodge, near Olney, Bucks,*  
*Feb. 12, 1788.*

DEAR MADAM,—A letter from a lady who was once intimate with my brother could not fail of

<sup>1</sup> Born 1735 ; died 1795.









age, and the state of his health, when I saw him last, must have been long dead. I never was acquainted with the family further than by report, which always spoke honourably of them, though in all my journeys to and from my father's I must have passed the door. The circumstance, however, reminds me of the beautiful reflection of Glaucus in the sixth *Iliad*; beautiful as well for the affecting nature of the observation, as for the justness of the comparison, and the incomparable simplicity of the expression. I feel that I shall not be satisfied without transcribing it, and yet perhaps *my* Greek may be difficult to decipher.

Οἷη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίηδε καὶ ἀνδρῶν.  
 Φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δέ θ' ὕλη  
 Τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὥρη·  
 Ὡς ἀνδρῶν γενεή, ἣ μὲν φύει, ἣ δ' ἀπολήγει.<sup>1</sup>

Excuse this piece of pedantry in a man whose Homer is always before him. What would I give that he were living now, and within my reach! I, of all men living, have the best excuse for indulging such a wish, unreasonable as it may seem, for I have no doubt that the fire of his eye, and the smile of his lips, would put me now and then in possession of his full meaning more effectually than any commentator. I return you many thanks for the elegies which you sent me, both which I think deserving of much commendation. I should requite

<sup>1</sup> 'Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,  
 Now green in youth, now withering on the ground;  
 Another race the following spring supplies,  
 They fall successive, and successive rise:  
 So generations in their course decay,  
 So flourish these, when those have pass'd away.'

*Pope's Version.*

























cousin Henry shone as he did in reading the charge. This must have given much pleasure to the General.  
—Thy ever affectionate, W. C.

## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*March 1, 1788.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—That my letters may not be exactly an echo to those which I receive, I seldom read a letter immediately before I answer it, trusting to my memory to suggest to me such of its contents as may call for particular notice. Thus I dealt with your last, which lay in my desk while I was writing to you. But my memory, or rather my recollection, failed me, in that instance. I had not forgotten Mr. Bean's letter, nor my obligations to you for the communication of it: but they did not happen to present themselves to me, in the proper moment, nor till some hours after my own had been dispatched. I now return it, with many thanks for so favourable a specimen of its author. That he is a good man, and a wise man, its testimony proves sufficiently; and I doubt not, that when he shall speak for himself, he will be found an agreeable one. For it is possible to be very good, and, in many respects, very wise; yet, at the same time, not the most delightful companion. Excuse the shortness of an occasional scratch, which I send in much haste; and believe me, my dear friend, with our united love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, of whose health we hope to hear a more favourable account, as the year rises,—Your truly affectionate

WM. COWPER.









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TO MRS. KING

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of the matter as I, who am as well informed as any sportsman in England.—Yours,

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

*Weston Underwood, March 3, 1788.*

I OWE you many acknowledgments, dear madam, for that unreserved communication, both of your history and of your sentiments, with which you favoured me in your last. It gives me great pleasure to learn that you are so happily circumstanced, both in respect of situation and frame of mind. With your view of religious subjects, you could not indeed, speaking properly, be pronounced unhappy in any circumstances; but to have received from above not only that faith which reconciles the heart to affliction, but many outward comforts also, and especially that greatest of all earthly comforts, a comfortable home, is happiness indeed. May you long enjoy it! As to health or sickness, you have learned already their true value, and know well that the former is no blessing, unless it be sanctified, and that the latter is one of the greatest we can receive, when we are enabled to make a proper use of it.

There is nothing in my story that can possibly be worth your knowledge; yet, lest I should seem to treat you with a reserve which, at your hands, I have not experienced, such as it is, I will relate it.—I was bred to the law; a profession to which I was never much inclined, and in which I engaged rather because I was desirous to gratify a most indulgent father, than because I had any hopes of success in it myself. I spent twelve years in the Temple, where I made no progress in that science,







remain, though with a very good understanding of the matter, like horse and mule that have none.

We shall now soon lose our neighbours at the Hall. We shall truly miss them, and long for their return. Mr. Throckmorton said to me last night, with sparkling eyes, and a face expressive of the highest pleasure — ‘We compared you this morning with Pope; we read your fourth *Iliad* and his, and I verily think we shall beat him. He has many superfluous lines, and does not interest one. When I read your translation, I am deeply affected. I see plainly your advantage, and am convinced that Pope spoiled all by attempting the work in rhyme.’ His brother George, who is my most active amanuensis, and who indeed first introduced the subject, seconded all he said. More would have passed, but Mrs. Throckmorton having seated herself at the harpsichord, and for my amusement merely, my attention was of course turned to her. The new vicar of Olney is arrived, and we have exchanged visits. He is a plain, sensible man, and pleases me much. A treasure for Olney, if Olney can understand his value.

W. C.

#### TO GENERAL COWPER

*Weston, 1788.*

MY DEAR GENERAL,—A letter is not pleasant which excites curiosity, but does not gratify it. Such a letter was my last, the defects of which I therefore take the first opportunity to supply. When the condition of our negroes in the islands was first presented to me as a subject for songs, I felt myself not at all allured to the undertaking: it seemed to offer only images of horror, which could by no



























see you at Weston, and then you will have an opportunity to taste for yourself, gratis. They came into my hands at a time when I was perfectly idle, and being so, had an opportunity to study his language, of which by the help of a glossary at the book's tail, I made myself master. But he whose hands are not as vacant as mine were at that moment, must have more resolution than I naturally possess, or he will never account it worth his while to study a dialect so disgusting.

Half a dozen times since I have been writing I have turned my eyes from the paper to squint at the chiffonier.

Had I not supposed that ere now my songs would have greeted your ears, your eyes would probably have seen them. It is possible that my suitors for that assistance may choose not to avail themselves of it till next winter. In which case I will continue to send them to you in the interim. To the General I have already sent twain, and in the only letter I have had from him since he received the first, he tells me that he was very much pleased with it. Adieu, my dear.—I am ever thy most affectionate coz,

WM. COWPER.

(*N.B.*—Your present suffered not the least damage in the journey.)

#### TO GENERAL COWPER

*Weston Underwood, April 14, 1788.*

MY DEAR GENERAL,—Lest any mistake should have happened which you cannot otherwise be aware of, I thought it necessary to inform you that no hamper has yet arrived. Sometimes our parcels







that, as the year rises, Mrs. Newton's health keeps pace with it. We expect Mr. and Mrs. Powley soon, but take it for granted, as they are gone first to Laytonstone, that him, at least, you will see before we shall see him.—Accept our best love to your whole trio, and believe me, my dear friend, affectionately and truly yours, W. C.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*Weston Lodge, May 1, 1788.*

MY DEAREST CUZZY-WUZZY,—Behold the pill new made and the dose more brightly gilded! May the patient be much the better for it, and the apothecary and nurse well paid. Then you and I shall have no cause to complain.

I have lately sent you nothing but scraps instead of letters, but I shall soon grow more prolix, having more to communicate than the time will at this present writing allow. Mrs. Frog told you indeed the truth. I have had a letter from her, the brevity of which was the only cause of complaint with which it furnished me; though even of that I made no complaint in my answer to it, having too much Christian consideration of her various and multifarious engagements to be so unreasonable. They have been now a month in London, and if she and Mr. Frog are men of their word, another month brings them back again.

I told you that I admire Mrs. Maitland's Muse, and I told you the truth; she has no need to fear a critical eye, an eye at least that is truly such. There are several very beautiful turns of expression and versification in the copy, and the whole is good.









*Kate*.<sup>1</sup> A gentleman last winter promised me both her and the *Lacemaker*, but he went to London, that place in which, as in the grave, 'all things are forgotten,' and I have never seen either of them.

I begin to find some prospect of a conclusion, of the *Iliad* at least, now opening upon me, having reached the eighteenth book. Your letter found me yesterday in the very act of dispersing the whole host of Troy by the voice only of Achilles. There is nothing extravagant in the idea, for you have witnessed a similar effect attending even such a voice as mine at midnight, from a garret window, on the dogs of a whole parish, whom I have put to flight in a moment.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, May 12, 1788.*

It is probable, my dearest coz, that I shall not be able to write much, but as much as I can I will. The time between rising and breakfast is all that I can at present find, and this morning I lay longer than usual.

In the style of the lady's note to you I can easily perceive a smatch of her character. Neither men nor women write with such neatness of expression, who have not given a good deal of attention to language, and qualified themselves by study. At the same time it gave me much more pleasure to observe that my coz, though not standing on the pinnacle of renown quite so elevated as that

<sup>1</sup> *Crazy Kate*.—The original of *Crazy Kate* was probably Elizabeth Robinson, known in Olney as 'Poor Bet Robinson.' Her reason partly returned to her. She died at Olney in April 1821, aged sixty-five years. See letter of 24th May 1788 and *The Task*, Book i.







who should have the management of it, the new plan of a daily post has dropped to the ground, and we now have our letters only three times in the week, as usual.

I beg that you will give my love to Mrs. Frog, and tell her it is time she were gone to Bucklands. According to my reckoning, which I know to be very exact, she has already stayed her allotted time in London, where if she still continues frisking about heedless how time goes, and is after all to take a frisk to Bucklands also, I shall be glad to know when we are likely to see her at the Hall again? It is true that northerly winds have blown ever since she left us, but they have not prevented the most exuberant show of blossoms that ever was seen, nor the singing of nightingales in every hedge. Ah, my cousin, thou hast lost all these luxuries too, but not by choice, thine is an absence of necessity. The Wilderness is now in all its beauty: I would that thou wert here to enjoy it. Our guests leave us to-morrow. Fare thee well. Thanks for the two lists of subscribers, and for Mr. Vickery's most admirable puff.—Yours, my dearest, ever,

WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*May 24, 1788.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—For two excellent prints I return you my sincere acknowledgments. I cannot say that poor Kate resembles much the original, who was neither so young nor so handsome as the pencil has represented her; but she was a figure well suited to the account given of her in the





















had he doubled the age he reached. At any age his death would have been felt as a loss, that no survivor could repair. And though it was not probable, that for my own part I should ever see him more, yet the consciousness, that he still lived, was a comfort to me. Let it comfort us now, that we have lost him only at a time when nature could afford him to us no longer; that as his life was blameless, so was his death without anguish; and that he is gone to heaven. I know not, that human life, in its most prosperous state, can present anything to our wishes half so desirable as such a close of it.

Not to mingle this subject with others, that would ill suit with it, I will add no more at present, than a warm hope that you and your sister will be able effectually to avail yourselves of all the consolatory matter with which it abounds. You gave yourselves, while he lived, to a father, whose life was, doubtless, prolonged by your attentions, and whose tenderness of disposition made him always deeply sensible of your kindness in this respect, as well as in many others. His old age was the happiest that I have ever known, and I give you both joy of having had so fair an opportunity, and of having so well used it, to approve yourselves equal to the calls of such a duty in the sight of God and man.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, June 15, 1788.*

ALTHOUGH I know that you must be very much occupied on the present most affecting occasion, yet, not hearing from you, I began to be uneasy on



























































again. I believe I related to you the incident which is the subject of it. I have also read most of Lavater's<sup>1</sup> Aphorisms; they appear to me some of them wise, many of them whimsical, a few of them false, and not a few of them extravagant. *Nil illi medium.* If he finds in a man the feature or quality that he approves, he deifies him; if the contrary, he is a devil. His verdict is in neither case, I suppose, a just one. W. C.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, Aug. 21, 1788.*

MY DEAREST COZWOZ,—Our friends, as you opine, are gone, having made us, (to ourselves at least,) a very agreeable visit. We are now as quiet as dormice in a hollow tree, but not always so, neither shall we be so to-day, nor yet to-morrow. The Frogs dine us with us to-day, and to-morrow we with them. The Dowager<sup>2</sup> and George arrived yesterday. They have also at their house an aunt of Mrs. Frog's named Canning, together with her husband: so we are likely to be a numerous party. But be not alarmed, my dear, lest such a feast should produce a famine. There would, I confess, be danger of it, were we to entertain such multitudes often; but we and our neighbours have, without a word said on the subject, fallen on the only method that could certainly prevent it. We receive five or six invitations, and sometimes more, for one that we give;—a measure extremely salutary to the finances of a poet;—and poet as I am, I could not eat with any com-

<sup>1</sup> Johann Kaspar Lavater. See note, vol. ii. p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> Widow of Sir Robert Throckmorton.







































(Mrs. Unwin has this moment opened the screen, which I admire, and shall find particularly useful.)

I sent you, my dear madam, the poem I promised you, and shall be glad to send you anything and everything I write as fast as it flows. Behold my two volumes ! which, though your old acquaintance, I thought might receive an additional recommendation in the shape of a present from myself.

What I have written I know not, for all has been scribbled in haste. I will not tempt your servant's honesty, who seems by his countenance to have a great deal, being equally watchful to preserve uncorrupted the honesty of my own.

I am, my dearest madam, with a thousand thanks for this stroke of friendship, which I feel at my heart, and with Mrs. Unwin's very best respects, most sincerely yours,

W. C.

*P.S.*—My two hares died little more than two years since ; one of them aged ten years, the other eleven years and eleven months.

Our compliments attend Mr. King.

TO MRS. KING

*Weston-Underwood, Oct. 11, 1788.*

MY DEAR MADAM,—You are perfectly secure from all danger of being overwhelmed with presents from me. It is not much that a poet can possibly have it in his power to give. When he has presented his own works, he may be supposed to have exhausted all means of donation. They are his only superfluity. There was a time, but that time was before I commenced writer for the press, when











































































































few indeed. I purpose, however, for the future to manage that matter with more discretion, and not to suffer an occupation by which I can gain neither money nor fame, to deprive me of the pleasure of corresponding with my friends, to me more valuable than either. . . . I am now in the sixteenth book of the *Odyssey*, and after having been so long engaged in it, begin with some impatience to look forward to the end of an undertaking almost too long and laborious for any creature to meddle with, the date of whose existence here is limited to three score years and ten.

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

*Weston, April 22, 1789.*

MY DEAR MADAM,—Having waited hitherto in expectation of the messenger whom, in your last, you mentioned a design to send, I have at length sagaciously surmised that you delay to send him in expectation of hearing first from me. I would that his errand hither were better worthy the journey. I shall have no very voluminous packet to charge him with when he comes. Such, however, as it is, it is ready; and has received an addition in the interim of one copy, which would not have made a part of it had your Mercury arrived here sooner. It is on the subject of the Queen's visit to London on the night of the illuminations. Mrs. Unwin, knowing the burthen that lies on my back too heavy for any but Atlantean shoulders, has kindly performed the copyist's part, and transcribed all that I had to send you. Observe, madam, I do not write thus







a woodcut representing yourself, Miss Courtenay,<sup>1</sup> and me, to make it complete. I will beg the favour of you to pass it into the hands of that lady when you have done with it.

The little folks whom you have left behind are all in perfect health; they were so yesterday. We expect Miss Courtenay to drink tea with us this evening, as she did on Monday, when she and I diverted ourselves with a game at spillikins. Your tiny nephew was here also, but fast asleep the whole evening, the most profitable way, I suppose, in which he can spend his time at present.

I pity you, you are going to Court, where the heat and the crowd will half kill you; make haste back again, for your park and all your environs grow every day more and more delightful.—With my best love to Mr. Frog, I remain, my dear Madam,  
most truly yours, Wm. C.

Mrs. Unwin's best compts.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

*The Lodge, May 20, 1789.*

MY DEAR SIR,—Finding myself, between twelve and one, at the end of the seventeenth book of the *Odyssey*, I give the interval between the present moment and the time of walking to you. If I write letters before I sit down to Homer, I feel my spirits too flat for poetry; and too flat for letter-writing, if I address myself to Homer first; but the last I

<sup>1</sup> ? Miss Stapleton, afterwards Mrs. George Courtenay Throckmorton. See letter of 6th June 1789. I have not seen the original of this letter.































































## TO SAMUEL ROSE

*Weston, Sept. 24, 1789.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You left us exactly at the wrong time. Had you stayed till now, you would have had the pleasure of hearing even my cousin say—‘I am cold.’—And the still greater pleasure of being warm yourself; for I have had a fire in the study ever since you went. It is the fault of our summers, that they are hardly ever warm or cold enough. Were they warmer, we should not want a fire; and were they colder, we should have one.

I have twice seen and conversed with Mr. Jekyll. He is witty, intelligent, and agreeable beyond the common measure of men who are so. But it is the constant effect of a spirit of party to make those hateful to each other, who are truly amiable in themselves.

Let me beg of you to settle for me, by a reference to your subscription-edition of Pope’s Homer, the knotty point that I mentioned to you, whether it be customary for the patron of the work to be a subscriber.

Beau<sup>1</sup> sends his love; he was melancholy the whole day after your departure. W. C.

## TO SAMUEL ROSE

*Weston, Oct. 4, 1789.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The hamper is come, and come safe; and the contents I can affirm on my own knowledge are excellent. It chanced that another hamper and a box came by the same conveyance,

<sup>1</sup> Cowper’s dog.







TO SAMUEL ROSE

22 Nov. 1789.

I THANK you for your history of Dr. White and his borrowed plumes. The man who could with any degree of complacence dress himself in a plumage so procured, was very likely to refuse payment for it when demanded. . . . London is not only an abomination in my account, because it runs away with my friends, but because it steals them at a season when we should be especially glad of their company.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Weston, Dec. 1, 1789.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—On this fine first of December, under an unclouded sky, and in a room full of sunshine, I address myself to the payment of a debt long in arrear, but never forgotten by me, however I may have seemed to forget it. I will not waste time in apologies. I have but one, and that one will suggest itself unmentioned. I will only add, that you are the first to whom I write, of several to whom I have not written many months, who all have claims upon me; and who, I flatter myself, are all grumbling at my silence. In your case, perhaps, I have been less anxious than in the case of some others; because, if you have not heard from myself, you have heard from Mrs. Unwin. From her you have learned that I live, and that I am as well as usual, and that I translate Homer: three short items, but in which is comprised the whole detail









is just recovered after a fortnight's illness, and Mr. Frog with his first fit of the gout, which seized him about a week since by the foot, and which confines him still.

As to ourselves we are much *in statu quo*, except that Mrs. U. has a slight nervous fever, accompanied with headaches, which she had not when you were here. She drinks lemonade, and finds it her best remedy.

Received from my master, on account current with Lady Hesketh, the sum of—one kiss on my forehead. Witness my paw, Beau x his mark.

Mrs. U. sends her affectionate compliments.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Weston, Dec. 18, 1789.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The present appears to me a wonderful period in the history of mankind. That nations so long contentedly slaves should on a sudden become enamoured of liberty, and understand, as suddenly, their own natural right to it, feeling themselves at the same time inspired with resolution to assert it, seems difficult to account for from natural causes. With respect to the final issue of all this, I can only say, that if, having discovered the value of liberty, they should next discover the value of peace, and lastly the value of the word of God, they will be happier than they ever were since the rebellion of the first pair, and as happy as it is possible they should be in the present life.—Most sincerely yours,

W. C.







imposed on the generous Athenian most egregiously, giving him instead of Homer's verses, which they had not to give, verses of their own invention. He, good creature, suspecting no such fraud, took them all for gospel, and entered them into his volume accordingly.

Now let *him* believe the story who can. That Homer's works were in this manner collected, I *can* believe; but that a learned Athenian could be so imposed upon, with sufficient means of detection at hand, I *cannot*. Would he not be on his guard? Would not a difference of style and manner have occurred? Would not that difference have excited a suspicion? Would not that suspicion have led to inquiry? and would not that inquiry have issued in detection? For how easy was it in the multitude of Homer-conners to find two, ten, twenty, possessed of the questionable passage, and by confronting them with the impudent impostor, to convict him. *Abeas ergo in malam rem cum istis tuis hallucinationibus, Villoisone!*  
—Faithfully yours, W. C.

## TO SAMUEL ROSE

*The Lodge, Jan. 3, 1790.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I have been long silent, but you have had the charity, I hope and believe, not to ascribe my silence to a wrong cause. The truth is I have been too busy to write to any body, having been obliged to give my early mornings to the revisal and correction of a little volume of Hymns for Children, written by I





non to negotiate a reconciliation; a passage of which nobody in the world is perfectly master, myself only and Schaulfelbergerus excepted, nor ever was, except when Greek was a *live* language.

I do not know whether my cousin has told you or not how I brag in my letters to her concerning my Translation; perhaps her modesty feels more for me than mine for myself, and she would blush to let even you know the degree of my self-conceit on that subject. I will tell you, however, expressing myself as decently as vanity will permit, that it has undergone such a change for the better in this last revisal, that I have much warmer hopes of success than formerly,—Yours,

W. C.

TO MRS. KING

*Weston Underwood, Jan 4, 1790.*

MY DEAR MADAM, — Your long silence has occasioned me to have a thousand anxious thoughts about you. So long it has been that whether I now write to a Mrs. King at present on earth, or already in heaven, I know not. I have friends whose silence troubles me less, though I have known them longer; because, if I hear not from themselves, I yet learn from others that they are still living, and likely to live. But if your letters cease to bring me news of your welfare, from whom can I gain the desirable intelligence? The birds of the air will not bring it, and third person there is none between us by whom it might be conveyed. Nothing is plain to me on this



































again, and so you may tell her, but I know that they will not disgrace me; whereas it is so long since I have looked at the *Odyssey*, that I know nothing at all about it. They shall set sail from Olney on Monday morning in the *Diligence*, and will reach you, I hope, in the evening. As soon as she has done with them, I shall be glad to have them again, for the time draws near when I shall want to give them the last touch.

I am delighted with Mrs. Bodham's<sup>1</sup> kindness, in giving me the only picture<sup>2</sup> of my own mother that is to be found, I suppose, in all the world. I had rather possess it than the richest jewel in the British crown, for I loved her with an affection that her death, fifty-two years since, has not in the least abated. I remember her too, young as I was when she died, well enough to know that it is a very exact resemblance of her, and as such it is to me invaluable. Everybody loved her, and with an amiable character so impressed upon all her features, everybody was sure to do so.

I have a very affectionate and a very clever letter from Johnson, who promises me the transcript of the books entrusted to him in a few days. I have a great love for that young man; he has some drops of the same stream in his veins that once animated the original of that dear picture.

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Cowper's cousin Anne, daughter of the Rev. Roger Donne. Cowper called her 'Rose.'

<sup>2</sup> It was this gift that led Cowper to write the beautiful lines *On the receipt of my Mother's Picture out of Norfolk*.







nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied.

Your nephew tells me, that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

TO JOHN JOHNSON

*Weston, Feb. 28, 1790.*

MY DEAR COUSIN JOHN,—I have much wished to hear from you, and though you are welcome to write to Mrs. Unwin as often as you please, I wish myself to be numbered among your correspondents.

I shall find time to answer you, doubt it not! Be as busy as we may, we can always find time to do what is agreeable to us. By the way, had you a letter from Mrs. Unwin? I am witness that she addressed one to you before you went into Norfolk; but your mathematico-poetical head forgot to acknowledge the receipt of it.

I was never more pleased in my life than to learn, and to learn from herself, that my dearest Rose<sup>1</sup> is still alive. Had she not engaged me to love her by the sweetness of her character when a child, she would have done it effectually now, by making me the most acceptable present in the world, my own dear mother's picture. I am perhaps the only person living who remembers her; but I remember her well, and can attest on my own knowledge the truth of the resemblance. Amiable and elegant

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Anne Bodham.



way yet again. Write to me soon and tell me when I shall see you.

I have not said the half that I have to say, but breakfast is at hand, which always terminates my epistles.

What have you done with your poem? The trimming that it procured you here has not, I hope, put you out of conceit with it entirely; you are more than equal to the alteration that it needs. Only remember, that in writing, perspicuity is always more than half the battle: the want of it is the ruin of more than half the poetry that is published. A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning, because nobody will take the pains to poke for it. So now adieu for the present. Beware of killing yourself with problems; for if you do, you will never live to be another Sir Isaac.

Mrs. Unwin's affectionate remembrances attend you; Lady Hesketh is much disposed to love you; perhaps most who know you have some little tendency the same way.

TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, March 8, 1790.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—I thank thee much, and oft, for negotiating so well this poetical concern with Mrs. —, and for sending me her opinion in her own hand. I should be unreasonable indeed not to be highly gratified by it, and I like it the better for being modestly expressed. It is, as you know, and it shall be some months longer, my daily business to polish and improve what is done, that when the whole shall appear she may find her









make me more industrious in the production of such pieces, and more attentive to the manner in which I write them. This reminds me of a piece in your possession, which I will entreat you to commit to the flames, because I am somewhat ashamed of it. To make you amends, I hereby promise to send you a new edition of it when time shall serve, delivered from the passages that I dislike in the first, and in other respects amended. The piece that I mean, is one entitled—‘To Lady Hesketh on her furnishing for me our house at Weston’<sup>1</sup>—or, as the lawyers say, words to that amount. I have, likewise, since I sent you the last packet, been delivered of two or three other brats, and, as the year proceeds, shall probably add to the number. All that come shall be basketed in time, and conveyed to your door.

I have lately received from a female cousin of mine in Norfolk, whom I have not seen these thirty years, a picture of my own mother. She died when I wanted two days of being six years old; yet I remember her perfectly, find the picture a strong likeness of her, and because her memory has been ever precious to me, have written a poem on the receipt of it: a poem which, one excepted, I had more pleasure in writing than any that I ever wrote. That one was addressed to a lady whom I expect in a few minutes to come down to breakfast, and who has supplied to me the place of my own mother—my own invaluable mother, these six-and-twenty years. Some sons may be said to have had many fathers, but a plurality of mothers<sup>2</sup> is not common.

<sup>1</sup> *Gratitude*, Globe Edition, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper’s ‘three mothers’ were (1) His own mother; (2) Mrs. Rebecca Cowper, his step-mother; (3) Mrs. Unwin. See April 19, 1790.

















Should you want me on any similar occasion hereafter, I am always at your disposal.

## TO JOHN JOHNSON

*Weston, April 17, 1790.*

YOUR letter that now lies before me is almost three weeks old, and therefore of full age to receive an answer, which it shall have without delay, if the interval between the present moment and that of breakfast should prove sufficient for the purpose.

Yours to Mrs. Unwin was received yesterday, for which she will thank you in due time. I have also seen, and have now in my desk, your letter to Lady Hesketh; she sent it thinking that it would divert me; in which she was not mistaken. I shall tell her when I write to her next, that you long to receive a line from her. Give yourself no trouble on the subject of the politic device you saw good to recur to, when you presented me with your manuscript; it was an innocent deception, at least it could harm nobody save yourself; an effect which it did not fail to produce;—and since the punishment followed it so closely, by me at least it may very well be forgiven. You ask, how I can tell that you are not addicted to practices of the deceptive kind? And certainly, if the little time that I have had to study you were alone to be considered, the question would not be unreasonable: but in general a man who reaches my years finds

That long experience does attain  
To something like prophetic strain.

I am very much of Lavater's opinion, and



desire of a line from you, and the delight he would feel in receiving it. I know not whether you will have the charity to satisfy his longings, but mention the matter, thinking it possible that you may. A letter from a lady to a youth immersed in mathematics must be singularly pleasant.

I am finishing Homer backward, having begun at the last book, and designing to persevere in that crab-like fashion, till I arrive at the first. This may remind you perhaps of a certain poet's Prisoner in the Bastille (thank Heaven! in the Bastille now no more),<sup>1</sup> counting the nails in the door for variety's sake in all directions. I find so little to do in the last revisal, that I shall soon reach the *Odyssey*, and soon want those books of it which are in thy possession; but the two first of the *Iliad*, which are also in thy possession, much sooner; thou mayest therefore send them by the first fair opportunity. I am in high spirits on this subject, and think that I have at last licked the clumsy cub into a shape that will secure to it the favourable notice of the public. Let not —— retard me, and I shall hope to get it out next winter.

I am glad that thou hast sent the General those verses on my mother's picture. They will amuse him,—only I hope that he will not miss my mother-in-law,<sup>2</sup> and think that she ought to have made a third. On such an occasion it was not possible to mention her with any propriety. I rejoice at the General's recovery;—may it prove a perfect one!

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Fall of the Bastille, 14th July 1789.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper of course refers to his step-mother, Rebecca Cowper, his father's second wife.



six years, an interval of eight months excepted. It is now become so familiar to me to take Homer from my shelf at a certain hour, that I shall, no doubt, continue to take him from my shelf at the same time, even after I have ceased to want him. That period is not far distant. I am now giving the last touches to a work which, had I foreseen the difficulty of it, I should never have meddled with; but which, having at length nearly finished it to my mind, I shall discontinue with regret.

My very best compliments attend Mrs. Hill, whom I love, unsight unseen, as they say; : but yet truly.—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

*May 2 (1790), Sunday, 2 o'clock.*

MY DEAREST Coz.—I send this in answer to yours just received, by express to Newport, to prevent if possible thy sending us any salmon at the enormous price you mention. We shall not in the meantime die for want of fish, my friend Sephus<sup>1</sup> having lately sent two baskets of mackerel, on the last of which we dine to-day, and Griggy<sup>2</sup> dines with us on a turkey to-morrow. Therefore send no salmon, unless you wish us both to be choked, till it comes down to a price that one may swallow with safety.

Our hearts jumped for joy at the Guardian's escape, of which the papers informed us, and we still sympathise with all parties concerned.

I shall be happy also if thou hast been able to acquaint my dear friend Spencer, either by means

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Joseph Hill.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Gregson, the priest.









name was Madan. When you shall have learned how he disposed of the much that he left, you will gratify my curiosity by informing me.

The Frogs made their transit from Chillington<sup>1</sup> to Bucklands on Sunday last, and will come home again the last week of the month. From her I have had a letter, which I answered yesterday. George is to join them here at their return, and then the village will seem peopled again.

Poor Beau has been much indisposed these two days, and I have sent him this morning to Gayhurst to consult the huntsman. What ails him, or what is the cause of his ail, I know not; but he is ever gulping, as if swallowing somewhat that would hardly pass, or retching, or coughing,—yet is his vivacity not in the least abated.

I have not heard lately from Johnson the Cantab, but wonder much more that I have had no answer from the Norfolk Rose,<sup>2</sup> to whom I wrote immediately on the receipt of her letter, sending her a loving and pressing invitation to Weston. The only news of the place is, that three great rogues have been apprehended at Olney, and are gone to prison,—one of whom will probably be hanged.

If thou hast any such things as rags (pardon the expression) belonging to thee, Mrs. Unwin is ready to beg them on her knees for the use of two miserable women on the point of producing,—we have not a rag left. When my odd book comes, they may come with it.

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Staffordshire. Seat of Mr. Thomas Gifford.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Bodham.



return every birthday, and every new year. He is an honest man.—Adieu !

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*The Lodge, June 6, 1790.*

DEAREST COZ,—I should sooner have acknowledged the receipt of thy charity-box had I not been lately engaged more than usual, not in poetry alone, but in business also. I now tell you, however, that it came safe, to our great joy, and to the great joy especially of the two future mothers whose children were in some danger not only of coming naked from the womb, but of continuing naked afterwards. The money has been divided between them, and the linen ; and by me they thank thee with unfeigned gratitude for thy bounty.

The business to which I allude above was my long unliquidated account with the Rev. Luke Heslop.<sup>1</sup> It has cost me many a fit of fretting, and many a time has sunk my spirits ; it has indeed been almost a continual vexation to me these twenty years. The delay has been occasioned by himself, and were the account justly settled, the balance would be in my favour, for I have lost more by his negligence than I owe him for his services ; yet notwithstanding these considerations which might, and ought perhaps to have consoled me, it is so detestable a thing to be considered as any man's debtor for so long a time, to be occasionally dunned for payment, and always liable to it, that it has plagued me past measure,

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Luke Heslop, Archdeacon of Bucks. See Letter of 25th Feb. 1789.



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TO JOHN JOHNSON

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and her best thanks for your kind answer to her solicitations.—I am, ever thine, W. M. COWPER.

Thanks for the papers, and for the odd *Odd-yssey*.

TO JOHN JOHNSON

*Weston, June 7, 1790.*

MY DEAR JOHN,—You know my engagements, and are consequently able to account for my silence. I will not therefore waste time and paper in mentioning them, but will only say that, added to those with which you are acquainted, I have had other hindrances, such as business, and a disorder of my spirits, to which I have been all my life subject. At present I am, thank God! perfectly well both in mind and body. Of you I am always mindful, whether I write or not, and very desirous to see you. You will remember, I hope, that you are under engagements to us, and as soon as your Norfolk friends can spare you, you will fulfil them. Give us all the time you can, and all that they can spare to us!

You never pleased me more than when you told me you had abandoned your mathematical pursuits. It grieved me to think that you were wasting your time merely to gain a little Cambridge fame, not worth your having. I cannot be contented that your renown should thrive no where but on the banks of the Cam. Conceive a nobler ambition, and never let your honour be circumscribed by the paltry dimensions of an university! It is well that you have already, as you observe, acquired sufficient information in that science, to enable you to pass





## TO SAMUEL ROSE

*The Lodge, June 8, 1790.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Among the many who love and esteem you, there is none who rejoices more in your felicity than myself. Far from blaming, I commend you much for connecting yourself, young as you are, with a well-chosen companion for life. Entering on the state with uncontaminated morals, you have the best possible prospect of happiness, and will be secure against a thousand and ten thousand temptations, to which, at an early period of life, in such a Babylon as you must necessarily inhabit, you would otherwise have been exposed. I see it too in the light you do, as likely to be advantageous to you in your profession. Men of business have a better opinion of a candidate for employment, who is married, because he has given bond to the world, as you observe, and to himself, for diligence, industry, and attention. It is altogether therefore a subject of much congratulation ; and mine, to which I add Mrs. Unwin's, is very sincere. Samson at his marriage proposed a riddle to the Philistines. I am no Samson, neither are you a Philistine. Yet expound to me the following, if you can.

*What are they, which stand at a distance from each other, and meet without ever moving ?<sup>1</sup>*

Should you be so fortunate as to guess it, you may propose it to the company, when you celebrate your nuptials ; and if you can win thirty changes of raiment by it, as Samson did by his, let me tell you, they will be no contemptible acquisition to a young beginner.

<sup>1</sup> For solution see Letter of 13th Sept. 1790.



minister<sup>1</sup> of the gospel at the Cape of Good Hope. With this additional occupation you will be sensible that my hands are full; and it is a truth that, except to yourself, I would, just at this time, have written to nobody.

I felt a true concern for what you told me in your last respecting the ill state of health of your much-valued friend Mr. Martyn. You say, if I knew half his worth, I should, with you, wish his longer continuance below. Now you must understand that, ignorant as I am of Mr. Martyn, except by your report of him, I do nevertheless sincerely wish it—and that, both for your sake and my own; nor less for the sake of the public. For your sake, because you love and esteem him highly; for the sake of the public, because, should it please God to take him before he has completed his great botanical<sup>2</sup> work, I suppose no other person will be able to finish it so well; and for my own sake, because I know he has a kind and favourable opinion beforehand of my translation, and consequently, should it justify his prejudice when it appears, he will stand my friend against an army of Cambridge critics. It would have been strange indeed if *self* had not peeped out on this subject. I beg you will present my best respects to him, and assure him that were it possible he could visit Weston, I should be most happy to receive him.

Mrs. Unwin would have been employed in transcribing my rhymes for you, would her health have

<sup>1</sup> Van Lier, converted by reading John Newton's *Cardiphonia*. His letters, written in Latin, contain an account of his religious experiences. Cowper, at Newton's request, translated them into English.

<sup>2</sup> Martyn's edition of Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary*. Practically a new work, published in 1807.



Homer, whom I am miserable to abandon for a whole morning !' This, and more of the same sort, passed in my mind on seeing the old woman above-said.

The troublesome business, with which I filled my last letter, is (I hope) by this time concluded, and Mr. Archdeacon satisfied. I can, to be sure, but ill afford to pay fifty pounds for another man's negligence, but would be happy to pay a hundred rather than be treated as if I were insolvent,—threatened with attorneys and bums. One would think that, living where I live, I might be exempted from trouble. But alas ! as the philosophers often affirm, there is no nook under heaven in which trouble cannot enter ; and perhaps had there never been one philosopher in the world, this is a truth that would not have been always altogether a secret.

I have made two inscriptions lately at the request of Thomas Gifford, Esq.,<sup>1</sup> who is sowing twenty acres with acorns on one side of his house,<sup>2</sup> and twenty acres with ditto on the other. He erects two memorials of stone on the occasion, that when posterity shall be curious to know the age of the oaks, their curiosity will be gratified.

My works therefore will not all perish, or will not all perish soon, for he has ordered his lapidary to cut the characters very deep, and in stone extremely hard. It is not in vain, then, that I have so long exercised the business of a poet. I shall at least reap the reward of my labours, and be immortal probably for many years.—Ever thine, W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. John Throckmorton's father.

<sup>2</sup> Chillington Hall, Staffordshire.



size, nor unwieldy, nor voracious; neither, I dare say, does he sleep after dinner, according to the practice of the said serpent. But harmless as he is, I am mistaken if his mutinous clergy did not sometimes disturb his rest, and if he did not find their bite, though they could not actually eat through him, in a degree resembling fire. Good men like him and peaceable, should have good and peaceable folks to deal with, and I heartily wish him such in his new diocese. But if he will keep the clergy to their business, he shall have trouble, let him go where he may; and this is boldly spoken, considering that I speak it to one of that reverend body. But ye are Jeremiah's basket of figs. Some of you could not be better, and some of you are stark naught. Ask the bishop himself, if this be not true! W. C.

## TO MRS. BODHAM

*Weston, June 29, 1790.*

MY DEAREST COUSIN,—It is true that I did sometimes complain to Mrs. Unwin of your long silence. But it is likewise true, that I made many excuses for you in my own mind, and did not feel myself at all inclined to be angry, nor even much to wonder. There is an awkwardness, and a difficulty in writing to those whom distance and length of time have made in a manner new to us, that naturally gives us a check, when we would otherwise be glad to address them. But a time, I hope, is near at hand, when you and I shall be effectually delivered from all such constraints, and correspond as fluently as if our intercourse had suffered much less interruption.

You must not suppose, my dear, that though I



may be said to have lived many years with a pen in my hand, I am myself altogether at my ease on this tremendous occasion. Imagine rather, and you will come nearer to the truth, that when I placed this sheet before me I asked myself more than once, 'How shall I fill it?' One subject indeed presents itself, the pleasant prospect that opens upon me of our coming once more together; but that once exhausted, with what shall I proceed? Thus I questioned myself; but finding neither end nor profit of such questions, I bravely resolved to dismiss them all at once, and to engage in the great enterprise of a letter to my quondam Rose<sup>1</sup> at a venture. — 'There is great truth in a rant of Nat. Lee's, or of Dryden's, I know not which, who makes an enamoured youth say to his mistress,

' And nonsense shall be eloquence in love.'

For certain it is, that they who truly love one another are not very nice examiners of each other's style or matter; if an epistle comes, it is always welcome, though it be perhaps neither so wise nor so witty as one might have wished to make it. And now, my cousin, let me tell thee how much I feel myself obliged to Mr. Bodham for the readiness he expresses to accept my invitation. Assure him that, stranger as he is to me at present, and natural as the dread of strangers has ever been to me, I shall yet receive him with open arms, because he is your husband, and loves you dearly. That consideration alone will endear him to me, and I dare say that I shall not find it his only recommendation to my best affections. May the health of his relation

<sup>1</sup> Mrs Bodham's name was Anne, but Cowper had always called her 'Rose.'

(his mother I suppose) be soon restored, and long continued, and may nothing melancholy, of what kind soever, interfere to prevent our joyful meeting. Between the present moment and September our house is clear for your reception, and you have nothing to do but to give us a day or two's notice of your coming. In September we expect Lady Hesketh, and I only regret that our house is not large enough to hold all together, for were it possible that you could meet, you would love each other.

Mrs. Unwin bids me offer you her best love. She is never well, but always patient, and always cheerful, and feels beforehand that she shall be loth to part with you.

My love to all the dear Donnes of every name!—  
Write soon, no matter about what. W. C.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*July 7, 1790.*

Instead of beginning with the saffron-vested morning to which Homer invites me, on a morning that has no saffron-vest to boast, I shall begin with you.

It is irksome to us both to wait so long as we must for you, but we are willing to hope that by a longer stay you will make us amends for all this tedious procrastination.

Mrs. Unwin has made known her whole case to Mr. Gregson, whose opinion of it has been very consolatory to me: he says indeed it is a case perfectly out of the reach of all physical aid, but at the same time not at all dangerous. Constant pain is a sad grievance, whatever part is affected, and she



ment so very bewitching as music, especially when we produce it ourselves, do not steal from you ALL those hours that should be given to study. I can be well content, that it should serve you as a refreshment after severer exercises, but not that it should engross you wholly. Your own good sense will most probably dictate to you this precaution, and I might have spared you the trouble of it; but I have a degree of zeal for your proficiency in more important pursuits, that would not suffer me to suppress it.

Having delivered my conscience by giving you this sage admonition, I will convince you that I am a censor not over and above severe, by acknowledging in the next place that I have known very good performers on the violin very learned also; and my cousin, Dr. Spencer Madan, is an instance.

I am delighted that you have engaged your sister to visit us; for I say to myself, if John be amiable, what must Catherine be? For we males, be we angelic as we may, are always surpassed by the ladies. But know this, that I shall not be in love with either of you, if you stay with us only a few days, for you talk of a week or so. Correct this erratum, I beseech you, and convince us by a much longer continuance here, that it was one.

W. C.

Mrs. Unwin has never been well since you saw her. You are not passionately fond of letter-writing, I perceive, who have dropped a lady; but you will be a loser by the bargain; for one letter of hers, in point of real utility and sterling value, is



I will add, however, in justice to myself, that they would not lower me in your good opinion; though, perhaps, they might tempt you to question the soundness of my upper story. Almost twenty years have I been thus unhappily circumstanced; and the remedy is in the hand of God only. That I make you this partial communication on the subject, conscious, at the same time, that you are well worthy to be entrusted with the whole, is merely because the recital would be too long for a letter, and painful both to me and to you. But all this may vanish in a moment; and, if it please God, it shall. In the mean time, my dear Madam, remember me in your prayers, and mention me at those times, as one whom it has pleased God to afflict with singular visitations.

How I regret, for poor Mrs. Unwin's sake, your distance! She has no friend suitable as you to her disposition and character, in all the neighbourhood. Mr. King, too, is just the friend and companion with whom I could be happy; but such grow not in this country. Pray tell him that I remember him with much esteem and regard; and believe me, my dear Madam, with the sincerest affection,—Yours entirely,  
WM. COWPER.

I have just left myself room to add Mrs. Unwin's true love.

TO JOHN JOHNSON

*Weston, July 31, 1790.*

You have by this time, I presume, answered Lady Hesketh's letter. If not, answer it without delay; and this injunction I give you, judging that it may



## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*August 11, 1790.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—That I may not seem unreasonably tardy in answering your last kind letter, I steal a few minutes from my customary morning business (at present the translation of Mr. Van Lier's Narrative), to inform you that I received it safe from the hands of Judith Hughes, whom we met in the middle of Hill-field. Desirous of gaining the earliest intelligence possible concerning Mrs. Newton, we were going to call on her, and she was on her way to us. It grieved us much that her news on that subject corresponded so little with our earnest wishes of Mrs. Newton's amendment. But if Dr. Benamer still gives hope of her recovery, it is not, I trust, without substantial reason for doing so; much less can I suppose that he would do it contrary to his own persuasions, because a thousand reasons that must influence, in such a case, the conduct of a humane and sensible physician, concur to forbid it. If it shall please God to restore her, no tidings will give greater joy to us. In the mean time, it is our comfort to know, that in any event you will be sure of supports invaluable, and that cannot fail you; though, at the same time, I know well, that, with your feelings, and especially on so affecting a subject, you will have need of the full exercise of all your faith and resignation. To a greater trial no man can be called, than that of being a helpless eyewitness of the sufferings of one he loves, and loves tenderly. This I know by experience: but it is long since I had any experience of those communications from





little power I have of that sort, to His fatherly and tender care in Whom you have both believed, in which friendly office I am fervently joined by Mrs. Unwin, I remain, with our sincere love to you both, and to Miss Catlett, my dear friend, most affectionately yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON (BOOKSELLER)

*Sept. 7, 1790.*

It grieves me that after all I am obliged to go into public without the whole advantage of Mr. Fuseli's judicious strictures. My only consolation is, that I have not forfeited them by my own impatience. Five years are no small portion of a man's life, especially at the latter end of it; and in those five years, being a man of almost no engagements, I have done more in the way of hard work, than most could have done in twice the number. I beg you to present my compliments to Mr. Fuseli, with many and sincere thanks for the services that his own more important occupations would allow him to render me.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

*Weston, Sept. 8, 1790.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We rejoice that, though unhorsed or rather horseless, you are come safe home again, and shall be happy to hear that you are mounted again, because our having the pleasure to see you here depends on it.

Mrs. Unwin, who is never well, is yet not worse than when you saw her last. As to myself, I am



I could hear of some trusty body going to London, to whose care I might consign my voluminous labours, the work of five years. For I purpose never to visit that city again myself, and should have been uneasy to have left a charge, of so much importance to me, altogether to the care of a stage-coachman. Johnny had no sooner heard my wish, than offering himself to the service, he fulfilled it; and his offer was made in such terms, and accompanied with a countenance and manner expressive of so much alacrity, that unreasonable as I thought it at first, to give him so much trouble, I soon found that I should mortify him by a refusal. He is gone therefore with a box full of poetry, of which I think nobody will plunder him. He has only to say what it is, and there is no commodity I think a freebooter would covet less.

W. C.

TO SAMUEL ROSE

*The Lodge, Sept. 13, 1790.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter was particularly welcome to me, not only because it came after a long silence, but because it brought me good news—news of your marriage, and consequently, I trust, of your happiness. May that happiness be durable as your lives, and may you be the *Felices ter et amplius* of whom Horace sings so sweetly! This is my sincere wish, and, though expressed in prose, shall serve as your epithalamium. You comfort me when you say that your marriage will not deprive us of the sight of you hereafter. If you do not wish that I should regret your union, you must make that assurance good as often as you have opportunity.



about the copy, I may want some person to negotiate for me; and knowing no one so intelligent as yourself in books, or so well qualified to estimate their just value, I shall beg leave to resort to and rely on you as my negotiator. But I will not trouble you unless I should see occasion. My cousin was the bearer of my mss. to London. He went on purpose, and returns to-morrow. Mrs. Unwin's affectionate felicitations, added to my own. conclude me, my dear friend, sincerely yours,

W. C.

The trees of a colonnade will solve my riddle.<sup>1</sup>

#### TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY

*Weston Underwood, Sept. 16, 1790.*

MY DEAR ROWLEY,—I have given you time to return to Dublin and to settle yourself there; and now perhaps you will find yourself at leisure to receive my thanks for the readiness with which you have resumed your enlisting labours, disagreeable in themselves, and which nothing but your friendship for him in whose service they are performed could render supportable. You will not think it sufficient, I trust, when you shall have completed your list, to send the money only, but will transmit the names of the subscribers also. Pardon a hint which could not possibly be wanted, except by an Hibernian, or by one who has lived long in Ireland.

You are happy who, I presume, have not to deal with booksellers and printers, the most dilatory of mankind, and who seem to exist only to torment and distract us miserable authors? My copy has

<sup>1</sup> See Letter to Rose of June 8, 1790.



preserve them also. The great success of the Rowleys at the last election is a subject of congratulation, for which I ought to have left myself more room. I can now only say that I sincerely rejoice in it, and that I am most truly yours,

W. COWPER.

Will not your trip to Bath afford you an opportunity to take a peep at Weston? Some of your trips to England I hope will do it, for I should greatly rejoice to see you.‡

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Sept. 17, 1790.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I received last night a copy of my subscribers' names from Johnson, in which I see how much I have been indebted to yours and to Mrs. Hill's solicitations. Accept my best thanks, so justly due to you both. It is an illustrious catalogue, in respect of rank and title; but methinks I should have liked it as well had it been more numerous. The sum subscribed, however, will defray the expense of printing; which is as much as, in these unsubscribing days, I had any reason to promise myself. I devoutly second your droll wish that the booksellers may contend about me. The more the better. Seven times seven, if they please; and let them fight with the fury of Achilles,

Till every rubric-post be crimson'd o'er  
With blood of booksellers, in battle slain  
For me, and not a periwig untorn.

Most truly yours,

WM. COWPER.









I have no objection at all to being known as the translator of Van Lier's Letters, when they shall be published. Rather, I am ambitious of it, as an honour. It will serve to prove, that if I have spent much time to little purpose in the translation of Homer, some small portion of my time has, however, been well disposed of.

The honour of your preface prefixed to my Poems will be on my side; for surely, to be known as the friend of a much-favoured minister of God's word, is a more illustrious distinction, in reality, than to have the friendship of any poet in the world to boast of.

We sympathise truly with you under all your tender concern for Mrs. Newton, and with her in all her sufferings from such various and discordant maladies. Alas! what a difference have twenty-three years made in us, and in our condition! for just so long it is since Mrs. Unwin and I came into Buckinghamshire. Yesterday was the anniversary of that memorable æra. Farewell.

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Oct. 26, 1790.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We should have been happy to have received from you a more favourable account of Mrs. Newton's health. Yours is indeed a post of observation, and of observation the most interesting. It is well that you are enabled to bear the stress and intenseness of it without prejudice to your own health, or impediment to your ministry.



in my power. The consideration of my short continuance here, which was once grateful to me, now fills me with regret. I would live and live always, and am become such another wretch as Mæcenas was, who wished for long life, he cared not at what expense of sufferings. The only consolation left me on this subject is, that the voice of the Almighty can in one moment cure me of this mental infirmity. That He can, I know by experience; and there are reasons for which I ought to believe that He will. But from hope to despair is a transition that I have made so often, that I can only consider the hope that may come, and that sometimes I believe will, as a short prelude of joy to a miserable conclusion of sorrow that shall never end. Thus are my brightest prospects clouded, and thus to me is hope itself become like a withered flower, that has lost both its hue and its fragrance.

I ought not to have written in this dismal strain to you, in your present trying situation, nor did I intend it. You have more need to be cheered than to be saddened; but a dearth of other themes constrained me to choose myself for a subject, and of myself I can write no otherwise.

Adieu, my dear friend. We are well; and notwithstanding all that I have said, I am myself as cheerful as usual. Lady Hesketh is here, and in her company even I, except now and then for a moment, forget my sorrows.—I remain, sincerely yours,

WM. COWPER.

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON

*Wotton, October 31, 1790.*

MY DEAR MRS. FROG,—I am not without expectations (too flattering perhaps) that I may receive a line from you to-day, but am obliged to write before it can arrive, that I may catch the opportunity of sending this to the post.

I saw Tom<sup>1</sup> yesterday; have seen him indeed twice or thrice in the course of the week, but our other interviews were casual; yesterday I called on purpose to pay my respects to him. The little man is well, save and except (if it deserves to be mentioned) a slight cold that affects him only at the nose, and which he owes to the change of our weather from sultry to very severe; his sister Tit I have not seen, but by the report of Mrs. Nunerly (if that be her name) and by the doctor's report also, she is in perfect health. You will be so good as not to make yourself uneasy in the smallest degree about Tom, suspecting that I represent the matter more favourably than truly, for I have told you all the worst.

Mrs. Nunerly desired me to tell you that she has not heard from Mrs. Gifford, which is the reason *you* have not heard from *her*.

Homer, at length, goes on merrily. The difficulty of procuring paper that pleased him was the cause of Johnson's tardiness, which I mentioned in my last. Henceforth, he promises me six sheets every week, at which I rejoice for two reasons, first because at that rate of proceeding we shall be ready for publication at the time appointed, and secondly

<sup>1</sup> Little Tom Gifford.

in the interval I shall never want employment. The list of subscribers' names that I sent to the Hall a short time before you left it was imperfect, the copyist having overlooked, in his haste to obey my commands, no fewer than forty and upwards. I flatter myself therefore, that with such additions as will not fail to be made before the subscription closes, the names will amount to full three hundred, which will pay the whole expense of printing seven hundred copies, which will be the number of the first impression.

A pretty subject this to entertain a fair lady withal! Rue the day that gave you a poet for a correspondent; every man writes most of that which he has most at heart, and authors of course about themselves and their labours.

Mrs. Unwin is as well as usual, my female and male cousin are in perfect health, and all unite with me in affectionate remembrances to our dear friends in Norfolk. Adieu!—Ever yours, Toot.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tom Gifford used to call the poet 'Mr. Toot.' This was the nearest he could get to 'Mr. Cowper' (pronounced, of course, *Cooper*). See Letter of February 1791.

#### END OF THE THIRD VOLUME







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